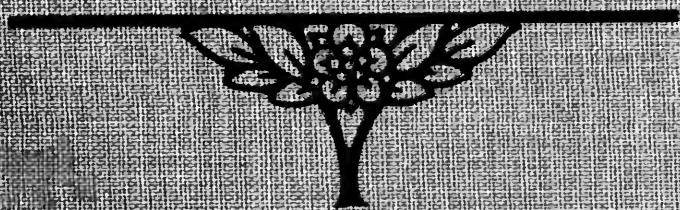
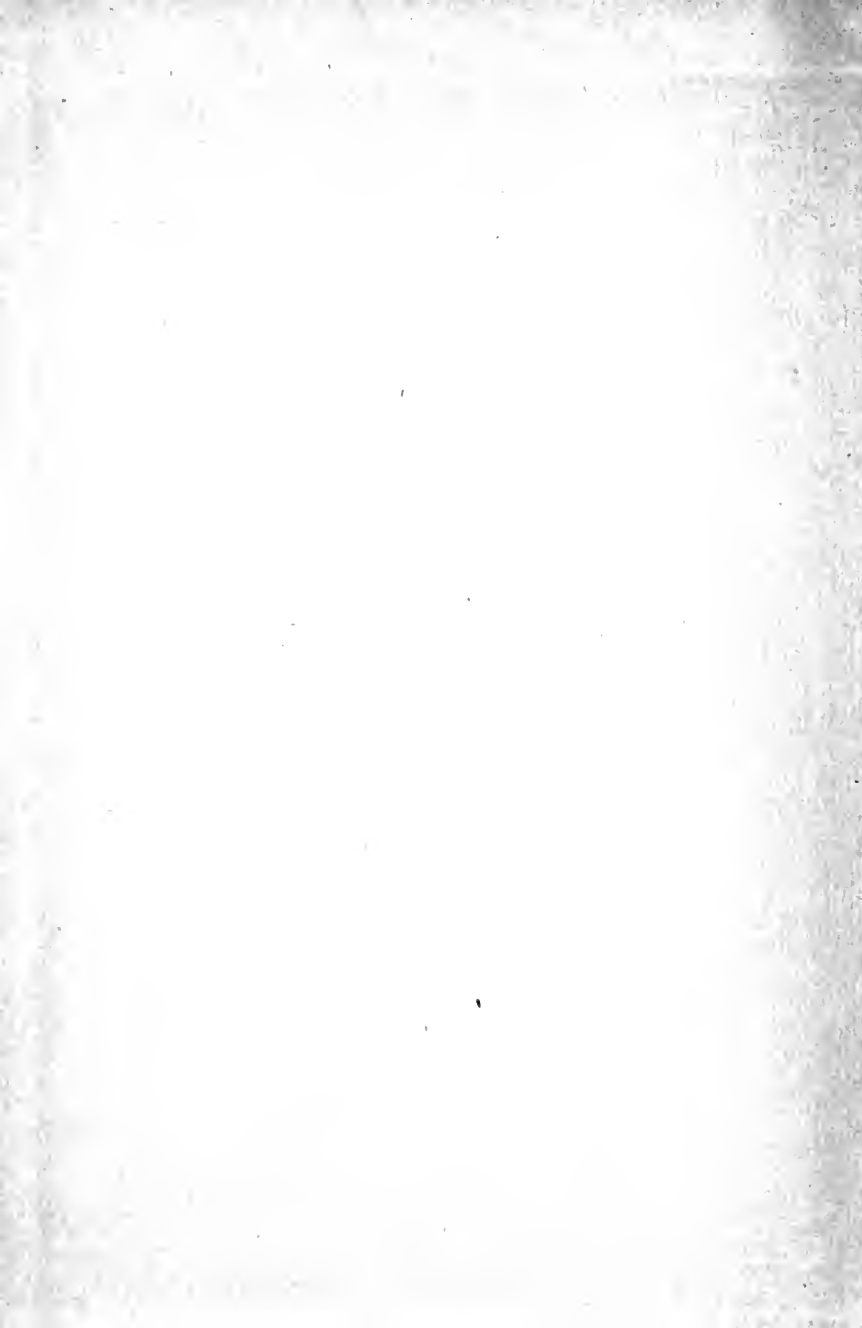


KALEEMA



Marion
McClelland



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KALEEMA



"That is a lie," she said

KALEEMA

BY
MARION McCLELLAND



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PART I

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KALEEMA

CHAPTER I

IN a dreary town of snow-bound North Dakota a girl was standing before a make-up shelf and looking into a cheap, distorting little mirror that elongated her pretty nose and foreshortened her chin beyond recognition. A feeble light in a cage hung against the wall over the glass. She had just fastened a gilt hoop earring on one of her ears and was idly looking into her own darkish-gray eyes with their dark lashes and fine, clear lines of dark brows; but her thoughts were with some one whom she supposed to be two thousand miles away.

In that supposition she was wrong. She had once been somewhat psychic about him, but half a year of nerve-racking uncertainty had deadened that. To-night she might well be tired for all the work she had just done; but, though the wretched cubby-hole of a dressing-room was icy cold, the work had only sent the blood rushing through her young body, making her feel warm and just ready to begin.

But "Camille" of Dillon & Skamon's "mag-

nificent productions," had expired for the night; the last curtain was down, the slim audience of sniffing women and self-conscious men was awkwardly filing out of the theater, while back of the gaudy curtain the untrained, half-drunken stage hands were raising a cloud of dust as they noisily shoved the battered scenery and furniture across the small stage. There was an ominous silence among the dressing-rooms, save for an occasional knock and "come in." A fresh vapor of the actors' tobacco was floating over the partitions that divided the dressing-rooms and was filling the dark, musty hall. Somewhere out of sight an open faucet was letting a small stream of water splash on the cement floor and soak a pile of posters that the next show had trustingly sent on.

Presently the knocking came to the girl's door.

"Are you decent?" said a man's voice outside.

"Wait a minute," she answered; then, "Come in."

When the man went in, the girl had slipped a waist over her bare shoulders, and as she turned toward him she gave him a quick little smile of welcome. It always mystified him when she did that. He knew little but guessed a good deal more about the person who was not two thousand miles away. Yet that look of welcome was unmistakable, and the blood in him rose quickly to meet it.

She was so lovable, so soft and warm and allur-

ing. It always disappointed and angered him when, the next instant, her lashes were lowered and the eyes with their look of welcome were shut away from him. To Carney it was very nearly like a slap in the face. He almost hated her for an instant, but as she had never encouraged any intimacy, what right had he to be angry? With all her quick magnetism it seemed to George Carney that she was surrounded by an invisible wall.

Most of the company took her for a wild little animal. Sarah Skamon, the manager's fat wife, understood her, and now and then a man with a mite of imagination could understand her — as tall Sam Taney could, for he was a Jew, very keen and eager — but poor big Carney had no imagination. He was just a man, an ex-pugilist, with a sort of smiled-in dent under each eye. Besides his imagination, Sam had his violin. That opened many doors and helped him understand many things. Often, after the hotel question was settled and Sam had attended to the mail and advised Miss Traxler to take a nap, to get her out of the way, he would take his violin and go into Kaleema's room, and she would embroider perfectly hideous clothes for the Giniven child while she listened to him. The Giniven child was the pest of Kaleema's days and nights. She detested its mother and father so profoundly that she pitied the unlovely child. She saved it many merciless whippings, just to spare her own nerves, so she

said, and at night she often jerked it into her own room and washed and hugged and kissed it and made it warm and comfortable in her own bed. Nobody else ever kissed the tantalizing, squalling little thing. Even on the trains she worked like a slave embroidering for it those unsuccessful clothes. Just that day she had finished making it a wadded hood of blood-red satin that old John Crichton, who was Irish and English and therefore knew all about tea fixings, said looked exactly like a homely tea cozy.

For a moment George Carney looked at the girl from the doorway, then he went to her and put something into her hand. For an instant she gazed at it, then she shot a glance of withering disgust at him and began talking—much more loudly than was necessary, which visibly got on his nerves.

“Three dollars!” she exclaimed. “Great big heavy, chunky silver dollars. Would n’t that trip a snake?”

She opened his overcoat pocket and dumped the whole three offending dollars into it.

“I say, Carney, take those back to that old Harry Skamon and don’t you ever come near my door again until you have an envelope. I need some *real* money; I’ve waited long enough for it; and I’m sick and tired of being paid off like a cheap dago with a pickax that can’t do anything better than dig up the sewer gas in Sixth Avenue.”

She turned him around and pushed him out, try-

ing to slam the door; but he stood there smiling, his fine white teeth showing and the dents deepening under his eyes, the door calmly held open by the width of his broad shoe.

"Better take it when you can get it," he said peaceably.

She closed her eyes and imperiously waved her hand for him to vanish. But he did not vanish. Moreover, her hand was not bejeweled as the hand of the magnificent *Camille* might justifiably have been, but instead was quite bare and very grimy. Both her soap and her jewels were rattling around in the bottom of her trunk; the soap as hard as a rock, and the jewels divorced from their settings.

"How will you pay your hotel bill, Kaleema?"

"Jump it. I don't care if I do disgrace the damn show. You owe me for three weeks."

"You can't spend any other money in this town."

"Yes, I can. Have to buy a hat."

"What's the matter with your hat?"

"Fell into the water pail last night."

"Clean water?"

"Whole company had washed in it!"

"Oh, come on, 'Leema. Behave yourself. . . . Oh, well, if you don't want the money for the hotel it's not up to me to force it on you."

He knew that would make her talk, anyway. And it did. She turned like a flash.

"What ails that old Harry Skamon? Is this

show closin'? This is n't the first time we've been ditched by a fool leadin' man. Of course they won't stay. *We* stay"—flinging her hands into the air to accentuate her disgust—"because we're just as happy as if we had sense. . . . I would n't have your job! And you once a respectable prize fighter! Carney, I'd go back to it if I had to spend my life boxin' a kangaroo. . . . I would n't be Skamon's business manager! In the first place there's no business to manage. It's degradin'—simply degradin'."

With that he allowed himself to be pushed out, and she closed the door. The ominous silence deepened as he went.

Two minutes later there was another knock at that same door. This time it was the departing leading man. He put his suitcase down on the floor and turned up his coat collar ready for the long walk through the dark and cold to get the midnight train that went east. Because he was young and a decent sort, he felt guilty that he was leaving them, but in the bottom of his heart there was a silent cry of joy that the ordeal was over and he was going out of that bleak country. Kaleema knew it, too.

"Train's two hours late," he observed as he stood there. "Leaves at two o'clock instead of at midnight."

"Of course," she responded lightly, rubbing off a streak of paint under her eye. "Ain't it hell!"

“Good-by, Miss West,” he said. “You’ve been a brick of a friend to have with a show. I’ll see you again, I know I shall.”

“You never will,” she said cynically. “I never run across any of the boys who stay sober. It’s the others I see — when they’ve a skinful and need a shave.” Then, earnestly, “I wish to God that I were going, too.”

She was fastening the other hoop earring on the other ear, and again looking at herself in the dizzy mirror. The earrings were immensely becoming.

“Why don’t you go, Miss West?” he asked.

“Yes, why don’t I?” she drawled mockingly.

She began screwing the top on her can of cold cream and throwing things into the tray of her trunk, the earrings dangling wildly at her ears. Suddenly she began fumbling with something and talked without looking at him.

“Do me a favor? Remember that dreadful woman who was begging last summer on Broadway — around Times Square and down as far as Macy’s — short hair, and a little black hat — selling pencils and whining ‘Please help a poor paralyzed woman’?”

Yes, he remembered her. “About as paralyzed as I am,” he commented.

“Perhaps. But if you get back there and see her, give her this.” Kaleema put a dollar into his

limp hand. "Last night I had a dream and she was in it."

As she spoke she turned back to the powder and confusion on the shelf.

"One whole dollar!" groaned the departing leading man. "Two dinners at Joubert's."

"Once I knew a woman who had that same kind of slow voice," Kaleema responded.

"But I'm not going to Broadway; it's only Randolph and Clark this winter."

"Then give it there — to any woman who looks as if she had crawled out into the daylight after a dreadful night."

He dropped the money into his pocket, picked up his suitcase and went out, closing her door. For the wild hoodlum that she really was, she was very depressing all of a sudden.

A few minutes later George Carney came back to the theater for something. The place was deserted. Even the trunks had gone, and her door was standing open; but the light was on and he went and looked in. She was still there.

"You here!" he said in surprise. "Everybody has gone. It's a wonder they did n't lock you in."

"I suppose so," she answered.

He started to ask something, then stopped. He was wondering where the boys were who usually took her to a restaurant and back to the hotel.

"I'm mad at everybody and tired out," she went

on, "and the leadin' man's skipped and Heaven knows what we'll draw now. If he's a fright, he'll stay; if he's fit to be seen, he'll go. I bet the next one will whistle in the dressing-room. If he does, I'll break his head. This chap that just left would n't admit it, but I know perfectly well that he has a home. If managers were wise to this game they would n't take anybody but penniless orphans. Compared to a signed certificate from an orphan asylum, experience and press notices would mean nothing." She made a face and shrugged her shoulders up under the hoop earrings. "And I had to go to the bottom of my trunk, too!"

Her hat and jacket were hanging on a nail, and she was fastening her belt. As he stood there watching her he was a serious, good-looking, business-like man, with the odd dent in the cheek under each eye. Perhaps he was born with those dents, but they seemed as if he had smiled them in. It was his physical perfection that had first made her notice him. He was clean and strong, with the ease and freedom of his own consciousness of these things. She did n't bother with the fact that he had finally broken in training, or that there could ever have been anything brutal in his life; but with him, as with the acrobats she knew, the something pagan in her took recognition of the way the head was poised on the shoulders and the firmness of the mold. She had never seen a fine statue, but many

a time she had stood in the tent or in the wings, her keen eyes watching the muscles of the circus men work and tighten under the naked skin.

Carney never said very much, but she did not have to look at him to know what was in his face just then. And she dared not look. She wanted it so much — his affection — just because it went a little deeper, a good deal deeper, than the banter and nonsense of every day. She knew it so well — the old longing and heart-hunger of the road, where all faults are worn on the outside, and the primitive instincts, too. She talked on cheerfully, hurrying to get out of the stillness of the building, keenly aware that it was not often that he came to her door this way. Carney tried not to look at her. He always kept away from her when things were relaxed and quiet after the show.

"You're queer, Kaleema," he said. "I don't believe you ever had a sweetheart with a show."

"Just chums are better — like the boys. They're easier to manage. And every time you speak to somebody else they don't go on the warpath."

"And it does n't hurt so when it is over," said the man.

She could not speak, and the next instant he was beside her, holding her in his arms with her head back, her face very, very close to his own.

"Don't, Carney," she said sharply. "Let me go."

For a moment he held her fiercely, then let her go and stood looking at her, wondering why he was such a fool that she could stop him.

Kaleema jerked down her hat and jacket and put them on as she and Carney crossed the deserted stage and went out into the cold wind.

Less than a hundred miles away, in the Park Hotel at Three Rivers, a young man just that day arrived from the East was waiting and shivering in his room. He had left the evening crowd collected in the warm office below — the office and the kitchen being the only warm places in the hotel — and sat huddled in his overcoat for the sake of being alone. Angry impatience was smoldering within him, for to make sure that he would not arrive too late he had come a day too soon.

He was a very different sort from those who usually came this way. He was slight but tall; his head was handsome, with close-cut hair brushed well off the brow. He had the air of a subordinate who was highly trained to come in contact with important men and to be discreet about big business. He was well dressed, and his hands were unusually white for a man. Cleanliness fairly radiated from him.

His head was bent over a scattering of business letters that he was trying to answer, but between his eyes and the page there kept appearing to his mental vision a girl's face — sweet and restless and weak

and strong, but in her eyes there was no answer. He admitted now that he loved her; he thought — but only thought — that she loved him. He kept seeing, too, very vividly the place where he had first seen her in New York — a cheap boarding-house in West Thirty-eighth Street where he had gone with another fellow that hot Saturday afternoon. The hurdy-gurdy music was resounding loudly through the sweltering street and booming in at the open windows. She was sitting on the stairs, throwing pennies to the hand-organ child who had come into the lower hall. Then suddenly the hand-organ monkey escaped and ran in, and she was afraid of it and ran screaming up the stairs, the monkey at her heels, tripped on her dress and fell right in front of him. Of course he picked her up, and of course the two boys gazed at her pretty face while she swore shockingly at the frightened monkey, and kept them all laughing for half an hour afterward. And of course another girl came into the hall to investigate the excitement, and then they all had dinner together at a cheap café.

In his face there was not the stamp of many decisions, but perhaps that was because he was young.

CHAPTER II

LONG past train-time the next day the young man in the dreary hotel was still waiting. The natives were accustomed to this state of affairs, but the stranger was not, and he kept running downstairs to ask questions, until the old man in the office audibly wished to Heaven that he had never come near the town. What's to be expected of a railroad when it's buried three feet under the snow!

Four miles away was Sunflower Junction.

"If we ever live to get home we'll all go to a resort for invalids," said Sarah Skamon, coming back into the junction station and banging the door against the blizzard. Sarah was fat and short, with big black eyes and swarthy skin. She was about forty-five years old, looking sixty in the daytime and sixteen at night when she had on a short dress and her soubrette wig with a pink bow pinned over one ear. Now she was playing *Prudence* and she hated it, too. She liked much better to be a soubrette and sing. That, however, distressed poor old Harry; even Trilby, the big, fat, lazy, white dog, winced at her top notes.

"No resort for me, not when I'm sober," re-

sponded Kaleema. "Once I went to Atlantic City, and inside of a week I was engaged to a cripple. I'm that kind-hearted."

She took a look at her cards and threw a penny on the suitcase that was balanced on a few knees to serve as a table. For a minute Mr. Giniven pondered and kept the game waiting.

"Gout," she continued to enlighten the company. "Legs the size of his waist. And he was no fairy."

"What became of him?" asked Sarah. Being fat, she was inclined to be sympathetic.

"Went on the rampage," replied Kaleema. "Threw a shoe at me and his servant. You know how long I stood for that. . . . Go on, Giniven, or quit playin'! You have n't brains enough to think for half an hour without hurtin' your head. . . . That night I went to the pier and danced with a guy I did n't know, and the next morning I beat it. He's lucky if God and his mother still love him. . . . Say, Giniven, is this a game of poker or an absent treatment?"

Jimmy Giniven, thus pressed, put down a penny, then regretted it. Miss Florence Daymond, otherwise Mrs. Jimmy Giniven, had already lost five cents, so she slammed down her cards and left, and the suitcase, deprived of her knee, tipped wistfully.

"Gee, she's lost five cents!" yelled Kaleema. "Say, that would buy a pie for the kid or a whole slam handwich. Gee! but they've got speed."

"Shut up, 'Leema," said Sarah.

The quarreling and wrangling began all over again. Carney was watching Kaleema, wondering if she would n't be equally sweet and lovable if she had some manners. He hated a racket. She knew it, and suddenly she looked at him and smiled.

A Swedish countrywoman sitting in a corner behind the stove looked frightened and gathered in her children. Save for them, the company had a monopoly of the station for the time being. Miss Godiva Traxler, a wispy blond, sat in a corner reading "Science and Health."

"What doin', Miss Traxler?" shouted Kaleema.

"Minding my own business," shouted back Miss Traxler.

Nobody dared laugh.

"Good night!" said Kaleema. "Lord, you must be blue."

"Such swearing!" expostulated Sarah, but nobody heard her. The men were talking angrily, and Kaleema was laughing.

"It's not that I care, but I hate a crooked game," said somebody.

"Crooked!" yelled Mr. Giniven. "Don't judge others by yourself. See?"

It was pandemonium let loose. Old John Crichton was n't in the game but he hated Giniven so that he was telling him what he thought of him. Charley Forbes, whose two hundred and ten pounds

seemed to consist mostly of profanity, was saying all he knew, and Sam Taney, his black eyes flashing, was silently waiting to exterminate the whole crowd in the next deal. The man behind the ticket window looked perfectly disgusted.

"Next season," said Kaleema, "I 'm goin' to take out a show of my own. No kids or *ex*-managers wanted. That lets out some of my best friends. See?"

"Better carry your own audience, too," suggested Miss Daymond, "and let 'em in on that. You'll need 'em."

"'Leema, shut up," said Sarah, pushing her shoulder. But it was no use. Kaleema was started.

"I knew we were goin' to pull off a fight to-day," she was announcing.

"Yes? Who told you?" This sarcastically from Mr. Giniven.

"Sportin' editor of the 'War Cry,'" politely answered Kaleema.

The ticket agent, who was a man of resource, quickly decided that if they took to killing one another he would pull the Swedes into the office and barricade the door.

"A hot bunch," he remarked to the telegraph operator, who agreed with him perfectly. They were sure that all had been drinking, but as a matter of fact nobody but old John Crichton had seen a drop for days. He drank instead of eating.

Sarah tried again.

"Harry, make them behave. Harry! Heaven forgive me that I should ever live to call that wabbling man my husband!" This last was directed to the stove or the coal scuttle or whomsoever it might concern, as she swept past the big, fat, despised Harry. But as Harry was the manager and not very popular just then, he had sense enough to mind his own business; so from out the depths of his scraggy fur collar he continued to gaze silently and raptly through the grimy window at the snow. Mentally he was vowing never again to so much as look at snow pudding. As for Sarah, he never paid much attention to her suggestions, anyway. To him she was still a child. When she was only sixteen he had taken her home to his mother, who made her her first long dress to be married in. In a way, it was like a boy who finds a stray dog, takes it home, feeds it, loves it and makes a chum of it.

John Crichton, he of the frayed clothes and fine intelligence, had stood it as long as he could, so he went out to pace the platform in the driving wind, a smile half tolerant, half cynical, on his once handsome face. Cold as it was, he forgot his overcoat and left it inside. This was for two reasons, though from one cause. He was always drinking, so that he did not so much feel the cold, and to buy the drink the overcoat was often sold. He so seldom

had one that he forgot it when he had it. Always the flush of liquor was in his face, but his work was invariably perfect, and to a woman he was ever the same kind, courteous gentleman.

Above the din there was a whine over in the pile of luggage, and Mrs. Giniven went to see if it were the Skamon dog or the Giniven child. Apparently it was the Skamon dog, for the Giniven child lay pallid and still, asleep on the bench, one grimy hand grasping the out-grown go-cart, more ridiculous than ever in the face of the snow.

"Oh, come on; be a sport and put up your pink ring, Charley," suggested Kaleema. "I'll put up my ti-ra-ra."

"I paid fifty dollars for that ring, Miss West," said Charley. He was very young, and he had a little mustache. Also, he was a rich man's son and he could n't forget it, nor did he want anybody else to forget it. Every week he got money from his mother. And he went to the best hotels. His father considered him legally dead, and fervently hoped he soon would be, physically.

"Yes, we have heard that before," observed Giniven, very dryly.

"Sure, that's all right, Charles, my boy; we all know you're a darn fool," said Kaleema.

"'Darn,' is it?" came from Mrs. Giniven's direction. "Sure, you must be reforming."

"I'm glad that it is noticeable," Kaleema retorted

urbanely, a tantalizing inflection in her voice; but, though it passed unobserved, a quick flush covered her face. All unwittingly Mrs. Giniven had touched a deep secret of the girl's soul. She was reforming. And she was mightily ashamed of it.

Charley Forbes threw the stub of his cigarette on the floor and planted his large foot on it.

"I'll put it up against every scrap of your false hair," he said, leaning forward and staring at the girl.

For an instant she looked into his bold, round, stupid eyes. She was thinking of *Camille's* pretty golden wig with its soft little curls. She did love it. She knew she could n't work or even remember her lines without it. She had paid ten dollars for it. And Charley was lucky, and she was not.

"Done," she said, very faintly.

Sam handed over the cards, and Charley shuffled and dealt them.

Kaleema looked bored and drew four. Charley looked bored and drew one. The hand was played and Charley won.

Kaleema whistled softly through her teeth, then she sang softly:

"There won't be any show to-night,
The leadin' lady's lost her tights."

"Well, anyway, this is a good time to get full to the wig-band," she observed.

The big fellow leaned back and laughed uproariously, a coarse chuckle, his derby on the back of his head, his fingers, stained to the knuckles by cigarettes, sprawled on his knees, the pink ring very obvious.

Kaleema was thinking.

"Charley," she said, "I'll play you another hand. You put up the wig and I'll put up my nightgown, and honest to Gawd I have n't but one."

Charley shuffled and dealt. Kaleema won.

She was through, and she got up and left him chuckling deeper and longer. He had plenty of good nature, a readiness both to work and to boast — and to cheat the railroads about the baggage.

Miss Traxler went out to fill her lungs with fresh air, Charley following her. She jumped up on an empty truck and sat watching an old freight train coming down the track. It entered Charley's head to give her a ride. He seized the handles and rushed the truck down the length of the platform, out to the very edge, and suddenly swung it around the corner. Having nothing to hold to, there was only one possible thing for Miss Traxler to do, so she promptly did it. She shot through the air and landed on her hands and knees in the middle of the track, her blue eyes still fixed on the approaching freight cars. They were then about a hundred feet away. Charley stood as if struck dumb and glued to the platform, so Godiva picked herself up and

stepped out of the way as the cars jerked over the spot where she had landed.

"You've torn your dress," Charley said limply.

"*I* have torn my dress?" demanded Godiva.

"Yes, and *I* have skinned my knees and hands and *I* have lost my Christian Science book under the freight train. And *our* train will come before that big snail gets out of the way!"

"No danger of that, Miss Traxler," interrupted John Crichton, who was by that time brushing the snow from her dress. "Open my bag and get the liniment, Charley."

Charley's power of locomotion returned, and when he came back with the liniment his tongue was running in profuse apologies, while they were sopping her bruises.

Inside the station Kaleema went to look at the Giniven child. It was fat and fluffy and spoiled; a wave of bitterness swept over the girl as she stood there. The blood-red bonnet accentuated its pallor (it seldom got any air and was fed mostly on pie), and she saw that there were dark blue circles under its eyes. The sound of some of its past punishments came ringing in her ears and made her shudder. She looked over at the mother — as she had looked a hundred times — selfish, coarse, with full lips and bold eyes, once a burlesque woman; then at the young father, a cad, dressed in freakish clothes, looking like a fool. From him her glance

met squarely and suddenly the honest gray eyes of Carney who was standing in the middle of the floor.

"Some day that kid will just fit into her mother's tights," she said bitterly.

She went to a window and looked out. It was the back of the station and she could not see where the railroads crossed, but she could look ahead and see where one road disappeared in the distance. The tracks had been cleared recently, and on either side was a ridge of snow. At a short distance from the station was a shed; and before it some old farm implement which, covered over as it was, made a white mound. At a little distance was a long, low row of old wooden buildings — an eating place, a harness shop, a grocery, two saloons, a hotel. Hidden somewhere, of course, was a wagon road. As the girl gazed idly, a figure emerged from the side of the station. It was a woman plodding toward the old wooden row. The wind was not blowing hard now, but presently she fell. She lay still for a moment, then she staggered to her feet and continued her uncertain way. After a short distance she fell again, and again she lay quite still. She was evidently getting her breath. But this time it seemed longer; then her head fell forward, and Kaleema saw that around her neck was a soiled bright ribbon. In the next breath the girl's hand was on the doorknob, and as she slipped out she quietly closed the door after her. When she reached

the woman, she bent over and looked at her; at the old ribbon that was wet and staining her neck, at her face — yes, in that condition she would have frozen in an incredibly short time. Kaleema shook her and made her get up.

“Thanks, dearie, thank you so much. Is n’t this dreadful weather, darling? Yes, darling, I can go alone. Yes, I’ll hurry.”

But the girl waited until she had disappeared behind a sheltering door.

Kaleema looked sharply at the track, the shed, the mound, the row of old wooden buildings. She took a deep breath. She understood. She had seen so many of those weary faces, and heard so many of those fumbling, scant-breathed voices; the soiled bright ribbons were like links of a chain of pity dragged through her life. But she had found it useless to think against God.

As she reëntered the station the front door suddenly opened and John Crichton came in briskly and picked up his bag. He completely forgot his overcoat.

At last the train!

CHAPTER III

FOR some minutes the office of the Park Hotel at Three Rivers had been deserted. Ice and snow covered the windows, and a broken pane, stuffed up with newspapers, let the wind sift through. To the right was the desk and the narrow flight of stairs; to the left were the swinging barroom doors, with the sociable sound of voices beyond. The stove was in the middle of the room and on it was a pail of water that was supposed to be heating. Vain hope!

In the windows facing the street and above the desk were sheets of flaring show-paper announcing:

DILLON & SKAMON

MANAGERS

OPERA HOUSE

JANUARY 7

CAMILLE

A county map and railroad time-tables were hanging on the walls. Newspapers were scattered about on chairs, table, and floor, and a small rusty oil-stove was pushed into a corner.

Presently a surly middle-aged man came in, half

frozen, his mustache covered with frost. He closed the door with a bang, then went to the stove and looked in. Black as night in there, and he closed that door also with a bang; then he buttoned his overcoat again, picked up a newspaper and sat down by the writing table. The next instant the swinging doors opened and the old landlord came in. The noise had done that much, anyway.

"Did you meet the train?" he inquired.

"Meet the train!" repeated Adam James, giving the newspaper a jerk. "No. I've something else to do besides standing on a platform this weather waiting for an engine to come along." Then he added, "I've been up at the mine. The trains can't get through."

"Eastern's just come. Boys just telephoned. Two hours late. Hope the show gets in on the Southern. Goin' to the Oprey House to-night?"

"No."

The old man busied himself about the desk, then gazed at the zigzags of frost on the windows for a while.

"Wakes a place up to have a company come along," he observed. He hated silence, especially in mean weather. "The first one that ever came this way brought the Gipsy —"

"It did?" interrupted James.

"Came the first year I had this place. My, but she had handsome eyes!"

“Yes, when she was drunk,” said Adam James. He gave the newspaper another jerk. “She was too bad to die; the devil did n’t want her. Neither did I. When she came near a camp of mine, I had her driven out. And one night she lay drunk in the road, crying.”

“Why, when she came here — ” began the old man, but stopped, for there was a sound at the door.

A traveler bustled in, put down his suitcase, and for a moment surveyed the office before he went to the stove and held out his hands. The old man dipped the pen and swung the register around for the stranger to come and sign his name. It was an unprepossessing creature that had arrived, large and awkward, very tired, very disheveled, and with oily black hair. He soon discovered the secret of the stove and, that hope abandoned, went and registered. Brian de Bassonville. The old man gazed at it. He could n’t read, much less pronounce it, and he mechanically scrawled an S, for supper, and the number of a room.

“Has the ‘Camille’ company come?” asked Mr. de Bassonville. His voice sounded as if he had a dreadful cold, and he lisped a little, too.

“Not yet,” replied the old man. “But that Southern should have been here three hours ago. They ’ll be comin’ along now any minute, most likely. Are you with the show?”

Brian’s lids drooped nonchalantly. “I am just

joining. I am the new leading man." He lighted a cigarette while this took root. "A rotten show, I suppose," he observed. "They all are."

Nobody bothered to encourage him. The old man went back into the barroom and de Bassonville flopped into a chair, took some papers from his pocket and puffed at his cigarette. He was so sleepy he could scarcely hold up his head.

"Very cold," he remarked to Mr. James.

"Yes, sir, it is," James replied.

De Bassonville roused himself and sat upright, something inquisitive in the tilt of his nose. "Do you run across a good many shows?" he inquired.

Adam James looked at him an instant before he answered, "I did, years ago."

"Years ago. How interesting," said de Bassonville. "In those days, on the whole, what did you think of them?"

"That all the women ought to have been hung." He said it viciously, and then he went into the barroom.

As the door swung closed there was a quick step on the stairs, and a young man came down, the one who had been waiting since the day before. When he saw de Bassonville he stopped short.

"Has the show come?" he asked eagerly.

De Bassonville turned and looked at him — a good-looking, well-dressed man, young but self-reliant in speech and manner. That was as far as

de Bassonville's observation was capable of penetrating.

"No," replied de Bassonville. "Are you joining?"

"No." Irritable impatience flashed into his face, and he shouted for the landlord.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Barton," said the old man, hurrying in.

"I say, can't you put some kind of heat in this place?"

"Why, do you feel chilly, Mr. Barton?"

"Chilly?" snapped Barton. "No. I'm so cold I'm numb."

The old man peered into the stove. It seemed almost a pity so ruthlessly to shatter his dreams. "Usually," he said, "this heats the whole house very nicely. Now, if you could sit down here —"

"Which I can not," interrupted Barton. "It may seem unbelievable but nevertheless I have some work to do, and I can't write letters and be disturbed. I'll just take this oil stove —" He made a quick dive for it, as if there were danger of somebody's getting it before him.

"I would n't, Mr. Barton," said the old man calmly. "I would n't bother with that stove. It's been broken, the important part of it, for a year."

By the time the sentence was finished Harold Barton was half way up the stairs; then he turned

and called down, this time his voice coming in a polite, apologetic wail.

“Have you heard from that Southern —”

The old man knew what was coming and cut him short. “No. She’s more than three hours —”

But he did not finish either, for he saw the pest disappear three steps at a time.

“He’s been running down here every ten minutes for the last three hours,” said the old man, appealing to the stranger for a sympathetic ear. “I don’t care at all how soon he packs his grip and leaves, not at all. He’s been more nuisance in the last twenty-four hours . . . and he didn’t eat his breakfast, not at all. The breakfast was all right, too — good coffee, good ham, good buckwheat cakes. I don’t care how soon he goes! Not at all.”

“Well, you see, he’s not a real actor. We actors get used to knocking around,” lisped de Bassonville with a haughty, off-hand pride.

Upstairs, behind a closed door, Harold Barton stood in the middle of his bare, cold room, motionless but for his heavy breathing and the twitching of his lips and eyes. If the boy could pray, he was praying then for God or chance to show him what to do.

Yes, the train was more than three hours late; and with his brain and body strung to a torturing tension he was trying to divine what that delay meant for him. Perhaps fate was pointing. He had had

time to think during that long night and longer day. But the thinking had got him nowhere. He was adrift and helpless, at the mercy of the half-conquered pride and sensitiveness that clung to him, caught in a merciless battle between family blood and tradition and the man's assertiveness that his life is his own to be lived in his own way.

On the table lay a letter that he had written. It was sealed, and addressed to Kaleema West. In it he had told her — brutally, because it could n't be told in any other way — that he had come to see her, but had gone before she came and would never see her or write to her again. For a moment as he stood there his gaze rested on it, and then he bit his lips and turned his back on it as if it were the pistol with which he had thought he meant to take his own life. Above everything, he was thinking of his mother. He respected and loved her. Kaleema West was something that she could never understand. This was the third time in his life that, for more than a few hours at a time, his mother had not reasonable knowledge of where he was. Those three times he had gone to some distant place to see Kaleema West.

Twice since they had known each other the girl had taken his head in her strong little hands and kissed his lips, and then caught her breath and pushed him away. He was trying not to remember that.

Suddenly he picked up his things that lay scattered about the room and threw them into his bag and closed it with a sharp snap. He would go.

But he was no nearer to going. He sat down by the table and stared at the unrelenting room. He could not marry her. That was too dear a cost of infatuation.

The habit of his whole life took his thoughts back home. When he was through college his father had got him into a broker's office and he was working there desperately hard. He had always worked. He had had to grind to get through college. He wanted money. He did not exactly envy his brother his wealth, but there was such a big difference in their lives. He did not let even his mother know it, but often he was desperately discouraged and blue. In a way, he felt entirely cut off from his family and their friends; for in their lives there was wealth and luxury everywhere and the enjoyments that only money can bring. Into his loneliness bitterness had begun to come. He must have companionship of some kind, and amusement that had fellowship mixed in, and it was while indulging in that of his own financial limits that he gravitated toward Bohemia and saw the girl with the dark gray eyes and the fine dark brows.

Suddenly he picked up the letter and put it in his pocket. Lying there, he felt that the girl could

read it before she came. He did not want her to do that before he made up his mind.

Then he closed his eyes to shut out memories, but that only shut them in. He wondered how long it had been since he came back upstairs. He stood up and looked again for his decision. All that he could see to do was something he was ashamed of.

Downstairs the landlord still stood stupid behind the desk, and de Bassonville was talking on and on.

"Now, for instance, these people needed a leading man so desperately that I was persuaded to come. Been dickering with Frohman and Brady all season, but as yet they have n't come to my terms. Been getting a divorce, too. Expensive things, these divorces."

"Yes," said the old man suddenly, when it dawned on him that it was time for him to speak.

"Bad season, anyway," de Bassonville went on. "All bad seasons ever since I've been in the business. I know pos-i-tively that Mansfield was just ready to fail completely when he died. . . . Now this piece is n't my line. My line is melodrama — heavies in melodrama, where you can get hold of it and make a scene of it."

He flipped the papers that he held and lighted another cigarette.

"Now this light stuff makes tricky study. I've been at it for two nights but I don't know any more than when I began. But I'll be all right to-night.

O-oh yes! It's the inspiration of the crowd and the applause that the actor needs. And *Armand* is a great part, oh-h yes, a great part."

But it was all lost, for the landlord had pricked up his ears in quite another direction, shamelessly indifferent to continuing his education. There was the sound of voices outside, and one of the hurrying figures was already at the door; it was pushed open, and Kaleema rushed in.

She had been running, and she was laughing uproariously. De Bassonville stuffed his part into his pocket, seized a newspaper and began reading as if his life depended on it, but he surreptitiously watched her from the corner of his eye.

"Gee! what a small stage! Where's the mail? . . . I choose the stove. I choose the stove!" She dropped her suitcase in the middle of the floor, dashed over to the oil stove, pulled it to a chair, sat down and began hugging it. "I knew there would be one in this town!"

The landlord and de Bassonville eyed her in dismay as she sat there shaking with laughter. Then the Skamons hurried in—he tall, she short; both bundled to their eyes in scraggly, moth-eaten furs, and both dejected. Sarah, carrying a huge bundle and very indignant, went straight to Kaleema.

"I suppose *I* shall have to freeze," she said.

Kaleema turned kindly to her. "Well, why in hell did n't you run faster?"

Sarah bounced away. The old landlord's heart missed three beats.

By that time they had all come in, Carney dignified and anxious, the rest of them only dejected. Even the suitcases looked blue as they sat on the floor and waited. Somebody registered for the crowd.

Sarah Skamon hunched up her bundle. "I never saw such a place as this is," she observed.

Kaleema began singing.

"All wildcat towns look alike to me,
I play three hundred and sixty-five a year, you see —"

"Sir, I must have a warm room," Sarah announced to the landlord.

"And I want a nice little cold one on the roof — roses on the mantel and pictures on the wall," said Kaleema.

Carney's nerves could not stand it a minute longer, and he disappeared into the barroom. Of course it was none of his business, but between Sarah Skamon and that 'Leema he was ready for a nervous breakdown.

The hotel-keeper was trying to be good-natured and calm. "Certainly, certainly," he said, "a nice room for everybody. Who's the leading lady?"

"I'm her," yelled Kaleema. "Gets all the scoldin's and does all the work."

By that time Charley Forbes was at her elbow. "Shut up!" he said. He had seen de Bassonville,

and here was a fine beginning to make a good impression on the new man.

Kaleema seemed not to hear him.

"Here, Trilby!" she called, and whistled, and Sarah's big bundle began to jump. Godiva Traxler was trying not to laugh.

Sarah was furious. "Don't call the dog! Is n't the stove enough for you?"

Kaleema snapped back. "Can't I call my own dog — even if it is dead? Here, doggie, doggie, doggie!"

The perspiration started on Charley's pasty brow. Sarah's bundle began to bound, and finally she opened it and pushed out the big, fat dog that had to stay in the bag on the trains.

"What ails you to-day, 'Leema?" she said crossly. "You 'll be crying before the day's over — see if you don't." She held up a grimy finger to warn her.

By this time de Bassonville had introduced himself to Harry Skamon. Charley was angry and disgusted. He went back to Kaleema. "Shut up!" he hissed.

"Mind your own business," snapped Miss Traxler, on her behalf, and Kaleema began investigating her oil stove. Nothing inside but the broken can. She looked at Traxler and then at Charley. Then she called out to the landlord.

"Say! she's busted! Say! she has n't any in-

sides!" Nobody heard her but Traxler and Charley. Sarah was talking to the new man. Kaleema carefully closed the stove and carried it over to her. "Here, honey," she said, "I was just teasin' you." She patted Sarah's fat back. "I never did mean to keep the stove."

All of a sudden Sarah was very forgiving. "No, I won't take it," she said, meaning that she was waiting to be urged.

"Yes, you will, honey," said Kaleema. "The manager's wife always has the stove."

Sarah took it reluctantly. "Then you come up to my room and get good and warm. Come, baby! come with mother. Come, baby! come with mother." This was for Trilby.

The landlord went ahead, and Sarah, carrying the stove, the dog waddling after her, struggled up the stairs. They passed right by the closed door behind which Harold Barton was standing.

Already there was a lump of worry in Harry Skamon's throat. The moment had arrived when the company must formally meet the new man. Of course it was none of their business to make any comments, but that would not keep them from doing it. While he stood in the middle of the floor screwing up his courage, he saw Charley Forbes go over to the three women and heard what he said to them.

"Well, Miss West, guess you've queered the new man, all right."

They turned suddenly and stared at de Bassonville, in their faces horror and despair. Skamon, the agony of decision taken from him, hurried over to them.

"Now, Kaleema, don't swear!" he implored excitedly. He scarcely knew what he was saying.

"He was queered some time ago," was all she said. She did n't even want to swear.

Skamon wiped his brow. "Yes. Now don't swear so he 'll hear it."

Kaleema turned to Godiva Traxler. "Now, what do you know about that? He 'll close the show. Take a peep at him. He 's the most awful lookin' thing I ever saw."

Skamon spoke to de Bassonville, trying to be very amiable.

"You go on to-night, of course?"

"O-oh yes," he answered, "I 'll be all right to-night." He caressingly tapped the thumb-worn part that was poking its head out of his pocket.

"Bet he does n't know two lines," Skamon heard Kaleema say to some one.

With that he turned to them, very pompous, to show his authority.

"Mrs. Giniven, Miss West, Miss Traxler, this is Mr. de Bassonville."

Florence Giniven and Godiva Traxler nodded and stared at him, Kaleema got up and gave him her firm, grimy little hand. This time a lump of sur-

prise was in Skamon's throat. People always forgot the mercy that was in her.

"I know you have had a long, hard jump to reach us," she said, and for the first time in two days the oily creature felt that life was still in him. He did not know that she was furious at him for being so homely and uncouth and greasy. He could have gone down on his knees in gratitude.

Thus encouraged, he became talkative. "Oh, we'll soon have things in great shape," he lisped. With a nod of her head Kaleema emphatically agreed with him. "Have n't been working for some time. Been getting a divorce. Expensive things, these divorces. But I'm going to break the record. Beat Lillian Russell. Been dickering with Frohman and Brady, too, but they have n't yet come to my terms."

Skamon dared not look at Kaleema, and he was so nervous by this time that he disappeared into the barroom. Carney was there, not drinking anything, looking like a sphinx.

"He's hung himself in three words, George," Skamon said, "and in five minutes there won't be a thread of him left. We may as well get drunk. I don't see that there is anything else to do."

"Now this is n't exactly my line," continued the excited leading man, "but it's all experience. My line is melodrama — heavies in melodrama — where you can get hold of something and make a scene out

of it." He clenched his big fists and shook them in the air. "Now this stuff makes tricky study. But I'll be all right to-night. Oh-h yes! It's the inspiration of the crowd and the applause —"

"Crowd?" Kaleema repeated, and she sadly shook her head. "We have n't been having any crowds. You'll have to work up without the crowd. We have even been sendin' the stage hands out front and askin' 'em to look pleasant — until it was time to cry. But we could n't ask 'em to give us a hand."

The melodramatic expression darkened in his face. He put his arms akimbo and glanced cautiously after Skamon, and lowered his voice.

"Bad business?"

"Rotten," Kaleema said through her teeth.

"Dear me! Never mind, little one, we'll pull through."

He patted her shoulder, seized his part, and vanished by way of the stairs.

For a moment they gazed at one another, speechless, then "My Gawd!" It seemed to come from everybody.

"Now don't anybody say that the worst is always yet to come," said Kaleema, her eyes flashing.

"Don't worry," said Taney. "He won't stay long. Frohman and Brady won't let him."

"Well, I don't like the look of things," said Miss Traxler, staring at Taney as if he were to blame.

"Who does?" inquired Mrs. Giniven; then she said, with an oath, "Marry him, one of you girls, and help him beat Lillian Russell."

"Better do it yourself," retorted Godiva. "Neither of us has married a freak yet."

Nobody missed her meaning.

Mrs. Giniven flared up. "Oh, callin' Jimmy Giniven a freak, are you?"

"Shut up," commanded Jimmy, glaring at his loyal spouse. "Better mind your own business, see?" A terrible thrust at Traxler was on the tip of Mrs. Giniven's tongue, but Jimmy wisely did not give her time. "Here we are in the wilderness," he continued, "no money for weeks, none in sight, this crazy fool for a leading man —"

"The man that sent him ought to be given a pass to the show and made to come to it," interrupted Kaleema.

"Skamon going crazy —" said Charley.

"The rest of 'em crazy before they left home," said Miss Traxler.

"All of us playing parts we can't play," said Mrs. Giniven, and she added further remarks as she turned away.

"Me playin' *Camille*!" said Kaleema. "Ain't it awful! — and not gettin' paid for so much as the eyelashes. Would n't it trip a snake!"

"Well, *I* am going to ask Mr. Carney for some money," announced Jimmy.

"Let the rest of us look at it when you get it," said Taney, but instead of answering Jimmy picked up the Giniven suitcases and went upstairs, followed by Mrs. Giniven with the folded go-cart and the Giniven child.

"I'm going to demand some money, too, Sam Taney," said Godiva Traxler. They were supposed to be chums, or sweethearts, or something. "Lots I've had out of this show! And pretty soon I'm going home. You take it very calmly, don't you? Don't even bat an eye. It's real funny, is n't it? And I suppose you'll be lettin' me beat it back alone, Sam Taney. You bet I'll size up the next bunch better than I did this one before I hit the road again."

"Oh, stop talking. You did n't leave much," said Taney.

"Oh, did n't I? You know all about it, don't you?" retorted Miss Traxler, and she, too, took her suitcase and disappeared up the stairs.

Dreamily Kaleema put her finger down the neck of her dress and began to pull out a string, and the next moment came a sad-looking little bag. She opened it and began to count her money. Charley's face was merely blank and pasty, for he did not understand, but there was a smile in Taney's dark eyes as he gazed down at her.

"Going to jump, 'Leema?" he inquired.

"You're right, Sam," she answered. "If that

bum legit upstairs lives through the rehearsal, I'll give Skamon a week; if he does n't, I go. I never did want to see that north pole, anyway."

She counted the money. It did n't take long.

"I can let you have five," said Taney.

"I don't want it, Sam. I'd rather stick in Kalamazoo."

"You'll stick there all right," he answered.

Her shoulders went up under the hoop earrings. It certainly did look like Kalamazoo.

"I wish I had taken Carney's silver dollars last night," she observed meditatively. She stuffed the money back into the sad-looking bag, then it descended down her neck, quite solemnly.

The two men went into the barroom.

For a few moments the girl sat alone, her thoughts very far away; then she heard voices and knew that Sarah Skamon and Miss Traxler were coming downstairs. They both had pitchers to get warm water, and Sarah began dipping it out from the pail on the stove.

"'Leema, that oil stove is broken, so you did n't miss anything," she said. Kaleema scarcely heard her.

Godiva had gone over to look at the register. Idly inspecting it, she read, "Harold Barton, New York City." She checked an exclamation and sailed over to Kaleema.

"Did I tell you that Harold Barton is here to-day?"

Kaleema turned and looked at her. For an instant her lips were dry and she could not speak. Then, "Harold — here?" she said.

"Yes. He may be here now for all I know," Miss Traxler answered, and began to fill her pitcher.

Kaleema's face went white. For a moment she looked at her, stunned, then she turned on Godiva in a flash of jealous rage.

"How did you know?"

"Go and look at the register, silly," drawled Miss Traxler. "I just this minute saw it."

Kaleema went and looked at the open page. The name was there, written the previous day. For an instant she covered her face with her hands.

"Forgive me, Godiva. I was a fool."

"Sure," said Godiva.

"You're a fool, all right, 'Leema, and in love, too," said Sarah Skamon as Miss Traxler went back up the stairs.

"No, I'm not," said Kaleema. "It was just my temper, and because — I was surprised." She bit her white lips and pressed her grimy little hands over her heart, for it seemed to her that Sarah could hear it beating. Then she added nervously, her voice lower, "I wish that he would stay away." In a sort of panic she was foreseeing what would

come. And just at a time when she was down on her luck, and lonesome — so lonesome.

“ ‘Leema, why don’t you marry that man?” Sarah came nearer and spoke very seriously.

Kaleema laughed harshly. “Why, it’s nothing but a flirtation.” Her white lips twisted in a little sneer.

“Flirtation!” retorted Sarah. “See here, ‘Leema, this is the third time that he has been to see you this season.”

“Well?” said the girl, as Sarah paused.

“And a man does n’t follow a show for a flirtation.”

“I wish he would let me alone and stay away,” said Kaleema.

Sarah earnestly put a hand on her shoulder. “Don’t be a fool, ‘Leema. And don’t be such a wild, secretive little thing. He is a gentleman, and he has a little more than his wits. And you have worked so hard and been so good that you deserve some happiness on earth. Even if he has n’t any money I wish that you would marry him, dear, and get out of this hard work and have a home.”

Kaleema closed her eyes and laid her hand on Sarah’s. “Oh, Sarah, don’t bring it down to material things!”

The quick tears welled up in Sarah Skamon’s eyes. That sounded so young, so full of youth’s idolatry! For a moment she held Kaleema close, praying an

unformed prayer that the idols might not be broken.

“Kaleema!”

It was a man's voice from the stairs.

“Why, Mr. Barton!” exclaimed Sarah.

“How do you do, Mrs. Skamon!” He ran down and seized both her hands.

“We were just talking about you,” said Sarah.

“Saw your name on the register. You must be crazy to follow a show this terrible weather. Pity you can't act, you're so fond of starvin' and freezin'.” She started off upstairs.

“I am afraid that depends on who is at the other end of the road, Mrs. Skamon,” he answered, laughing.

“Yes, that makes a difference,” said Sarah, and disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

KALEEMA."
"Harold!"

They were alone in the office and he kissed her.

"You have no idea how surprised I was when Godiva discovered your name on the register," said Kaleema.

To Harold's mind she was tiresomely calm. He did not know precisely what he had supposed she would say, but, at any rate, his vague expectancy was not fulfilled; far from it, considering the expensive journey and the wretched night in the cold hotel where the bedclothes were so short that his feet stuck out when his shoulders were covered and his shoulders stuck out when his feet were covered. So he had come from the Atlantic Ocean to North Dakota to meet this perfect composure? He had just got that thought clearly defined in his mind when she perched on the arm of a chair and began laughing and talking with childish joy, so happy that she did n't even look battered and tired as she had a moment ago. There was something undefinable about her that was very beautiful in Harold Barton's eyes. That was what was combating family tradition.

"When did you come?" she demanded.

"Yesterday."

"Why did n't you write to me that you were coming?"

"I did n't want to."

"But you nearly missed me."

"Missed you?"

"Hush! Yes, I am leaving."

"When?"

"Possibly to-day."

"Why?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Where are you going? Don't you know where you are going?"

"I believe the show will close here. They owe everybody money and a dreadful man has just come on. . . . What brought you? . . . Business?" She knew perfectly well it was n't business.

"No," said Harold. He thrust his hands in his pockets and walked away. The girl suppressed a smile as she watched his retreating back. He was most natural when he was irritable; she felt motherly toward him then. But suddenly she closed her eyes, as if the sight of him hurt her. It did; even the thought of the handsome head over there made her heart ache with longing.

"Why have n't you answered my letters? Where in thunder did you get those earrings?"

There was a half-conscious air of ownership about

him as he came back to her. Then suddenly he seized and kissed her until she lost her breath. How he loved her!

"Letters?" she repeated, laughing when she could. "If you could have followed this show you would know why I have n't written any letters. For the same reason that I have n't slept for two weeks — except on the top of my trunk, between acts. Such jumps, such business, such luck, such wildcat towns, such leading men! We have had three in three weeks. If they're any good they don't stay. And business!"

"What's the matter?" he asked mechanically, not as if he cared a great deal.

She shrugged her shoulders. "— And people don't know how bad the show is until they have seen it. It's just instinct that keeps 'em away. Why, I'm so tired I'm nearly ready to be saved."

"Kaleema, I want to talk to you seriously to-day." He spoke earnestly; he had been only half-listening to what she said. He did not care at all for her chatter. The show did not interest him; he was tired of it.

It seemed to her that the blood left her heart and that she was cold enough to shiver, but she went on quickly. "The advance man might as well go home. I think myself he is eatin' the paper and the glue. He looks as cadaverous as the show is. He's enough to queer a circus — or 'East Lynne.'"

"Kaleema!" She had acted this way many times before when she did not want to listen. Harold put his hand over her mouth and pressed her head against his shoulder. "Do you hear me?" he said. "I want to talk seriously to you to-day. Have I come to this God-forsaken place to be treated like a fool?"

She shook herself loose and pushed him away.

"You didn't come to this God-forsaken place because I asked you to," she said.

Again he thrust his hands into his pockets and walked over and stood by the frost-covered window, seeing nothing beyond. The girl went on, speaking nervously, her fingers working though she tried to keep them still.

"You know you have talked seriously before, and it always results in nothing but — heartache."

Her lips twitched as she said it, reluctantly. That was the way he always did. He said very little — just the same words and phrases, repeated over and over, and always when he left her her head was aching, as if she were very tired, and a sickening regret was eating at her heart.

By this time she was struggling to keep back words, and there was mingled anger and helplessness in her eyes. It was so hard to face it. She knew what he meant and wanted, though his boyishness shamefacedly kept the awkward words from being uttered. In his mind he blamed her for not under-

standing. Yet she did understand him. She was younger than he in years, but she had lived differently.

She loved him with the whole strength of what had been awakened in her. More than that, to her he typified the best and cleanest that God had put on earth. His handsome head, his intelligence and pride and sensitiveness — the whole clear-cut man was so different from those who peopled the life she knew that it made him seem honest and clean all through. In him she touched all the good that was striving for expression in her own soul. Ever since she was a child she had been reaching out from the darkness in which she lived and grew — and only God and she knew the depth and the humiliation of that darkness — for this response. It was since she had known him that she wanted to forget everything and begin life anew.

When she spoke again it was more slowly.

“You know perfectly well that I have my work to do to earn my living, but you want me to settle down and stay in one place so that I shall be near you and whenever you please you — can come.”

An old man passed through the office and Kaleema went over to a writing-table in a far corner and sat down, her elbows on the table, her lips pressed against her hands.

That was what had made the fall and early winter so hard to live through — this half-formed plan

that Harold had made. That was what had driven her restlessly through each day, dreading the letters that she longed for — dreading more his presence.

Carney had divined very nearly the whole truth. The company had spent a glorious autumn in the northern towns and forests, and day after day she and Carney would set out, after his first work was done, for long walks in the woods and along the streams, watching the great chained logs float by and the lumberjacks working away over the helpless monsters. They would ramble on until she was tired enough to rest, then they would stop a while, the man often lying on the ground, not talking very much, but thinking about her and watching her. And she with the ache in her heart for Harold. He was sorry for her, the poor little thing, but he would not admit that he loved her; he told himself he had never yet loved a woman who belonged in any way to another man. That was Carney's cleanness, that was his ideal. Kaleema understood him, too, as she did Harold. She was thinking of him now.

When the old man had gone Harold followed her and sat on the edge of the table, his back to the room.

"I was sick last week, too," she said. "I never felt so dreadful in all my life."

He did not seem to hear her.

"It started with my throat, and I felt burning up; my head was pounding and my throat was choking. And I was working just the same. I don't know

what would have become of me without George Carney. For three nights he never closed his eyes."

Suddenly the boy looked at her, his lips parted.

"He said he slept some, but I know he did n't. That's just like him. He would say anything to keep me from worrying. He kept ice on my throat and gave me the medicine and drinks of water and talked to me when I woke up."

"Where?" asked Harold. He was staring at her.

"In North Dakota. Where did you suppose?" She glanced up and saw the strange look in his eyes.

"In your room?"

"Certainly."

"All night? Was the door closed?"

For a moment she could not speak. Something clutched her that was like fright. She leaned back and looked at him.

"Yes," she said, "tight. All night. Except when he went in and out. The hall was very cold." Then she leaned toward him. The fright was gone. "See here, Harold, if you can't believe in God because you can't see him, and you can't trust anything human, then you'd better get down on your knees sometimes and worship the sun."

She rose and walked across the room. He sat still, looking at the floor. Presently she came back and stood before him.

"George Carney is the most splendid man I ever

knew. Try to understand him, Harold. It will make a bigger man of you. Sometimes I think that gentlemen, like thieves, in their hearts never trust anybody, but Carney can see through you and through me and through nearly everybody, and if he trusts — he trusts, that 's all."

She sat down again and leaned her elbows on the table. He was looking at her, at the color that had come into her cheeks and at her soft, dark hair. His face was flushed and he half closed his eyes. He did not want to frighten her by letting her see all.

"Listen to me," he said. "You shall listen!"

"Don't, Harold," she begged of him. "We have had this all out too often." Her low voice only drove him on.

"Yes, I will. Kaleema! Don't bother about work for a while. Just come back with me. Why can't we be happy for the rest of the winter? Something will turn up in town. What 's the use? Who is going to thank you for grinding like a slave? Why don't you take a little happiness?"

"Don't!" she said angrily. "I have listened to you for the last time. Every word that you say is rot." She defiantly met his eyes.

"You are going back with me."

She began playing with the pen.

"You don't care anything for me or you could n't treat me like this," he said at last.

A look of disgust crossed her face. He had said that so many times! Her only answer was an exclamation, half laugh, half sneer.

He put his arm around her neck and whispered to her. "Then go back with me, dear. Don't be so stubborn about a little thing."

"Don't call me stubborn. It makes it so hard when you do." Her lips were white again.

"Then come."

"When I am alone I make resolutions," she went on, not heeding him, "and then the minute you speak to me you pull them down. And you know it. I have begged of you not to do it, and it is cowardly, cowardly of you, Harold."

"Leema, you know how I love you — you know how I have loved you ever since those first days."

"Yes, I know," she answered quietly, turning away. If there was bitterness in the words, at least he heard none.

"I write to you," he went on, "and you don't answer; and if I beg of you to stay, off you go. I have loved you for a long time now. When it began it seemed only something that would soon be forgotten. But it can't be forgotten — night or day. It is half a year now and every day I love you more." It was the truth being wrung from him.

"Oh, don't," she said beseechingly.

He leaned very near to her and covered her hand with his. He could see that her eyes were closed.

All that was brutal in his love for her was glad that she was suffering.

“Will you go?”

“No!” she answered, and when the word was spoken her lips went white as death. “You are a coward, and I hate you when you ask me to go. . . . Keep on now, if you want to, but I have given you my answer!”

He flung himself from her. His own face was white and drawn. He was confronting the first big decision of his life, fighting the first struggle of heart and body and brain, of tradition and his own intense young manhood. The next moment he was back at her side. He did not look at her; he did not wait for anything. He rushed on blindly.

“Kaleema, will you marry me here — to-day? Will you? We’ll not wait until we get back home. Then there can be no question about your going with me.”

He talked as if this, too, were an old harped-on question, as if for the hundredth time he were begging her. Two men came through the swinging doors and went out on the street, but even while they were in the office he seemed incapable of seeing them or of lowering his voice.

“I am jealous of you but I can’t help trusting you. I do believe that you are straight and truthful, ‘Leema. And I *must* have you — I can’t live without you — I can’t, I can’t.”

He did not see the frightened unbelief that was in her eyes. She was dizzy; the whole dreary place seemed dark and whirling. She was trying her best to recollect what she had planned to do or say if things ever should come to this, but only irrelevant thoughts would come into her mind. Besides, he had said it so differently from the way she had dreamed it — not at all as he had loved her and talked to her at other times — especially at the beginning. But she set about to meet what had come. She must speak so that he should not know she was trembling.

“Are you sure that you know?” she asked quietly.

“Know what? What do you mean?”

“Are you sure you should ask me this in spite of — what we both have been thinking all this time — that a man like you should n’t marry any one like me.”

The barrier was down. They both breathed easier.

“Kaleema!”

“You know that you have your own way to fight in the world, now that your family has started you . . .”

“Well, what of that?”

“. . . and perhaps your — wild oats — should be left to die.”

“Don’t say such things,” he said. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead. What was the use

of talking about it now? He was trying his best to put all that out of his mind.

The landlord came in and sat down at the other side of the room, watching them curiously.

"I must," she said quickly, her voice very low, "for it is true. And it has made me fear the sight of you, because I knew what you were thinking — yes, I knew, Harold,— and I knew what was coming to me . . ."

"Have you loved me?"

She covered her face with her hands. "Yes."

For a moment there was silence, and he laid his hand on her shoulder. He did that so often to cover an insufficiency of words. But it was difficult to find just the right things to say to her. Probably words would have come easily enough, but the ideas themselves stuck outside his brain.

"I knew you were afraid of me —" she went on.

"Afraid of you?"

"Yes, afraid of me," she answered, "for you know all that it would mean —" She checked herself and turned away.

"Afraid of you?" he repeated.

"Yes," she rejoined almost fiercely, "and I would rather face it now, myself, than have it slapped at me afterward . . ." She had started bravely, looking straight into his eyes; then her lips went very white and she stopped suddenly.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She covered her face with her hands as if to shut out the self-inflicted inquisition. Something reminded her that happiness was here, and she was stopping on the threshold to forestall punishment. He put his hand against her cheek, and when she looked up at him the fierce courage was gone.

"For the last three months," she said slowly, "I have tried to be different, but . . . And I've nothing in the world, Harold, but three hundred dollars in a New York bank and three trunks full of rubbish!" She was very serious.

"Well?" he said.

Sometimes she did wish that he would say a little more.

"And—and you know the rest. All my life I have been just knocking around. It makes me afraid of so many things."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid of what life will be after the thing is done, when you look things squarely in the face."

"I have done that already," he said.

"You were such a fool six months ago," she went on with a little laugh. "You took me for a curiosity —"

He did not hear what she was saying. He tried not to look at her, but she could hear him breathing. "Will you marry me to-day?" he asked her.

"What will your mother say when you marry some of your wild oats and take them home?"

"I don't know and I don't care. I will do the talking now."

"Oh, yes, you will talk enough," she said, "and she will make kindling wood of every word you say. And she will blame me, not you —"

"She can't," he interrupted.

"Leave that to her. And there will be questions, unanswerable questions —" She stopped abruptly. She went over to the stove and from there she looked back at him. "But she shall never hate me, Harold, never. For I shan't let her. I am so happy now that nothing can go wrong."

The old landlord's interest grew.

Harold went to her eagerly. "Are you going to marry me now?" he asked very low, much to the disappointment of the old man.

"No."

"To-morrow?"

"No."

"Yes, you will. To-day. I'm the boss, from this on.

Kaleema laughed. That was what she wanted him to say. It made him seem more like a man.

CHAPTER V

SARAH SKAMON came clattering down the bare stairs, Trilby laboriously waddling after her. Sarah's heels clicked and Trilby's toes scratched.

It was a rude awakening from the dream. Harold turned impetuously. More than ever he hated the show. From the first it had taken her away from him.

When Sarah appeared Kaleema retreated to a corner to wait for what would happen. Even with her new happiness singing in her heart, she had still her work and her duty to the company to think of.

"Re-hears-al," Sarah drawled at the top of her voice.

Skamon and Carney heard it out in the barroom and came in and presently Mrs. Giniven, Godiva, and John Crichton arrived. Skamon had arranged with the landlord that considering how cold it was in every other part of the house they might use the deserted office for an hour.

Skamon came in with the battered book. Carney stayed in the barroom. He could hear much more than enough out there. Harold sat on a table out of the way, his eyes sulkily and hungrily on Kaleema. Skamon placed some chairs, and they all

stood around waiting for somebody else to come.

"Re-hears-al," Sarah called, going to the foot of the stairs. "Where's that man, Harry?" Skamon did not even reply, but sat down and opened the book. "*Armand!*" she called again, "we're waiting."

Upstairs a door opened and closed; there was a hurried tread, and de Bassonville, nervous and disheveled, appeared on the stairs. His part was sticking out of his pocket and he was smoking a cigarette. Skamon, chewing a big cigar, began amiably explaining things to the new man. He was always amiable to the new men. Every word of the stale old details wore on Kaleema's nerves. She glanced over at Harold and half smiled, then she came back to listening to Skamon's explanations about entrances and windows and the fireplace and furniture.

"Where are the other folks?" he demanded as he finished. When he spoke to Sarah he nearly snapped off her head.

"I don't know," answered Sarah, pacifically. After all, she was sorry for the poor, cross man. He had had a hard time of it that season with leading men.

"Well, go on, go on!" exclaimed Skamon, trying to control his temper. "I thought we had a few men with this show, but go on, go on. Mr. de Bassonville, we will begin with your entrance. *Nanine!* where is she?"

"Right here," replied Mrs. Giniven, very haughty. It was not necessary for him to yell when she was not three yards from his nose!

Skamon got up and began prancing about.

De Bassonville was standing up-stage, wild-eyed and listening intently. Sarah and Kaleema looked at him and then at each other. Then they began to cough, so that they should not laugh. Kaleema was in a state halfway between laughing and crying. She was nervously twisting her fingers, hoping and hoping the new man would fail. That would set her free.

Skamon went on explaining to the new man.

"*Nanine* comes on, announces *Madame Prudence* and *Monsieur Armand Duval*, goes off, and *Camille* sits down. Then you come on with *Prudence*." De Bassonville nodded wildly. "After you acknowledge the introduction you cross left —"

"No, right," interrupted Sarah.

"Who's managing this show?" snapped Skamon.

"Nobody," snapped Sarah. "That's what ails it."

"Keep still!" snapped Skamon.

"I won't," retorted Sarah. "I think I know."

Skamon looked at the book.

"Yes, it's right. Well, cross right. . . . Now!" He sat down, took out his ragged handkerchief and wiped his brow.

Another wait.

Skamon writhed.

"Will *Camille* be good enough to come on the stage?" he groaned.

"*Pahdon me!*" exclaimed Kaleema. She picked up her skirts and stalked in. The others turned away to hide their silly laughter. She did not care what Skamon said now. She was going to have a little fun. She had not meant to make him wait, but she was thinking of something else. Anyway, she was not very much afraid of him, perhaps because he owed her ninety dollars. Under such circumstances any manager would be rather lenient to his *Camille*.

Skamon closed his eyes, and de Bassonville stared open-mouthed at her as she stood on her heels.

"'Bid them enter,'" Kaleema said, with an exaggerated wave of her hand. Then she sat down on one of the chairs so precisely placed by Skamon.

Sarah turned de Bassonville around and beckoned him to follow her.

"'My dear *Camille*, allow me to present to you *Monsieur Armand Duval*,'" mumbled Sarah in a sing-song that sounded to de Bassonville like nothing but a hum until she reached the cue.

"'Must I rise?'" demanded *Camille*, who evidently had no intention of doing so.

Finally it dawned on de Bassonville that they were waiting for him. He knocked his brow and

struggled with his memory, then he seized the part, looked at it and thrust it back into his pocket.

“ ‘No, Mademoiselle; it is not necessary,’ ” he said.

Then Sarah surreptitiously motioned him to get out of the way. Of course it was none of her business, but Harry seemed to be asleep. Somebody had to tell the new man what to do, for he was standing there like a lamp-post.

“ ‘M — — m — — not go mad,’ ” *Camille* mumbled until she got to the cue.

Jimmy Giniven suddenly appeared from some mysterious direction and took his cue with mumbling while he slid across the floor.

“ ‘— at Tours,’ ” he said quite calmly.

Again everybody stood looking at de Bassonville. He seized the part and read it, hopelessly. He was really wondering where Giniven was when he picked up that cue.

Again there was a wait. Harry suddenly looked up.

“Well, go on, go on! What are you waiting for?”

“*Varville*,” said Sarah, very calmly.

“*Varville! Varville!*” shouted Skamon.

“Where is he?”

“At the post office,” said Giniven, also very calmly.

“Certainly, certainly,” said Skamon, very bit-

terly. "The post office can't wait but the rehearsal can. Well, go on, *go on!* Skip to *Camille*."

Camille pointed her grimy thumb at de Bassonville and winked at *Prudence* as she spoke to her.

"'I begin to like your friend,'" she said meaningly.

Poor Sarah choked trying to keep back her laughter. She wished to goodness Kaleema would behave. Harry would soon be raving and cursing.

"'I guessed it would be so,'" she answered.

Camille's shoulders went up under the hoop earrings and she clutched her hands under her chin. "'And did he really tell you that he loves me?'" she demanded, looking pleadingly into Sarah's eyes.

"'He did, and more,'" poor Sarah had to answer.

"'Monsieur Duval,'" said *Camille*.

Another wait for the new man. Trilby waddled across the floor and got stepped on, which made her yelp. Sarah slapped her soundly, which made her yelp more. Skamon rose and put the torn prompt book in his pocket.

"The rehearsal is off," he said. "Look over your part this afternoon," he added to de Bassonville with horrible restraint; then he sat down at the office desk to write a telegram which should evoke another leading man.

"Dear me," said de Bassonville, "this really is n't my line." And he dashed upstairs.

"He's got too much on his mind, dickering with Frohman and Brady," said Jimmy Giniven.

"And with getting divorces — 'expensive things, divorces,' " burlesqued Mrs. Giniven.

"He'll burst his head before night," said Godiva. "I wonder if he thinks there's going to be a show?"

Kaleema stood watching Skamon. She knew he was sending for another man. So now was the time for him to get another *Camille*. She went over to him, dreading it, because he could be very ugly. She sat down by the table and spoke in an undertone.

"Mr. Skamon," she said, "this seems to be a good time for me to go, as I have decided on leaving."

Skamon's eyes blazed.

"At the end of your two weeks' notice, Miss West," he said.

"To-night, unless you pay me the ninety dollars you owe me," she answered.

"I shall hold your trunk on your contract," he threatened.

"And I shall have you arrested if you owe me five cents when you do it," she retorted.

Skamon sneered, and she got up.

"I had intended giving you your notice to-morrow," he lied. "I have decided to let Miss Traxler play *Camille*. You will have to wait for your money."

"Everybody does, with you," she replied, and walked away.

The ninety dollars meant three weeks of hard work and piercing cold and sleepless nights and eternal traveling. She was accustomed to this sort of treatment. Only she hoped that Harold had not heard it. She had always been ashamed of these disgusting degradations, and her pride had done its best to keep them from him. He could never forgive all the meanness of her world. She felt that what she had been forced to accept from it would so lower her in his eyes. She meant to forget it herself now.

Carney had come in, and everybody understood what was going on. She asked Carney for the check for her trunk, and he gave it to her. Then she spoke to Sarah.

"I'm sorry, Sarah, on your account. But that creature will never know his lines."

Sarah did not reply. Kaleema was leaving them in a pretty plight. It was likely enough to close the show. What if they did owe her some money? Show business is show business; and she was lucky that season to be keeping a roof over her head. It was that Harold Barton; that's what it was. Sarah sat glumly looking at the floor.

Kaleema walked over to the window just as Charley Forbes and Sam Taney came in. She

rubbed some of the frost off the pane and looked through the cleared hole, and the boys could instantly see that something had gone wrong. Kaleema was calculating that the midnight train which the last leading man had taken the night before would come through this town, then go to Sunflower Junction, and that she and Harold could be married and get that train at about ten o'clock. In spite of Skamon she smiled. A throb of joy came as she stood there planning. Of course everybody would blame her, but they had no right; she was sick and tired of being cheated and cheated and cheated.

The silence was becoming uncomfortable. Sarah spoke to the old landlord.

"The show business is n't much good," she said.

A big, coarse man with a newspaper came in from the barroom and sat down in a chair by the stove. It was Adam James.

"No, it is n't," the landlord said wisely. "Just before you folks came Mr. James here and I were talking about the Gipsy."

There was a quick motion over by the window, but nobody noticed it. It was just that Kaleema partly turned her head. There was no outward sign that for an instant her heart stood still.

"She was with the first show that ever came to this town," continued the landlord.

"The Gipsy," mused Sarah. "Seems to me I've heard of her out here. Did you know her?"

"Just saw her once," replied the old man. "Wore earrings — like that young lady over there," nodding toward Kaleema.

"I knew her," said Adam James, tipping back in his chair.

"What did she do?" asked Sarah. "Soubrette? Did she dance and sing?"

"And steal," said Adam James.

"What do you mean?" said Sarah.

"Just what I say. She bewitched the men out here and got their money and spent it in gewgaws and drink, or threw it away. When she came near a camp of mine I had her driven out, for she was bad clear through."

"Don't say that about a woman who is dead."

The protest came from over by the frost-covered window, and the girl's voice was clear and low. But the blood was pounding in her throat and temples. Her dizzy eyes could scarcely see.

"She should have thought of that when she was alive."

"But she was n't bad clear through."

"That was before your day," said he. "She was out here years ago, a dissolute, besotted thing. She was bad when she came, and she had a child that she always kept with her and dragged through the same mire."

The words were barely uttered when Kaleema was at his side and had struck him such a blow across

the mouth that his chair fell back, and he lay on the floor.

Nobody could speak or move. Carney alone started; then his glance fell on Harold. As if for some place to look, Harold sat staring at Sarah Skamon, his eyes glassy and his dry lips pressed together. The girl stood and watched the man as he dizzily got to his feet. When he was up she stood looking steadily into his blurring, angry eyes. His lip was bleeding.

"That is a lie," she said. "She was my mother."

The man's hand closed and he started to move, but he suddenly found that Carney was standing before him.

"Well, what have *you* got to say about it?" James sneered.

"Nothing as long as you hold your tongue and stay right where you are," quietly answered Carney.

James's hand relaxed. He understood the accuracy in the ring-man's eyes.

Again the silence. It seemed as if the others had been turned to stone, but the girl had forgotten them. She saw nothing but Adam James, and there was nothing in her mind but the consciousness of her own purity and bitter memories. When she spoke her voice rang with their intensity.

"She did keep me with her, through every misery on earth; there *was* good in her and she gave it all to me. I was with her when you drove her from

the camps. I suppose you are Adam James. Because she hated you and would never take a copper from you, you hated her. But you never conquered her!"

She picked up her suitcase and went upstairs; they heard her go into a room and close the door.

She had been there perhaps a minute when the door was opened and Harold came in.

His face was livid.

CHAPTER VI

KALEEMA had stood her suitcase on the only chair in the room and thrown her hat and coat on the bed. When Harold opened the door she was at the dresser, idly fingering the edge of the soiled towel that covered the top of it. She kept this up, in silence, for perhaps half a minute after he came in. It did not surprise her that he stood there tongue-tied in the middle of the floor.

Moreover, she was not frightened and imploring as he expected she would be. Instead, though he did not know it, the agonizing strain of the past months was ended and it seemed to her that for the first time since she had known him the blood was flowing freely through her veins. She had tried, in a way, to make him understand about her, but now all deception was over. Thank God for that!

Her struggle was over, too. Many a sleepless night she had tossed through, trying to decide whether to hold to the laws and the customs that the women of his own world lived by, or accept the happiness he offered and its degradation. There was nothing on earth to stop for or consider; only, mysteriously rooted in her nature, was the dream and the longing for the best that life could give. Now she

had done her best, and the outcome was left to him. She was sure that everything between them was over. Somehow she did not much care. She felt that she had been slowly climbing to a great height, and when it was attained had fallen with a whirring crash back into the depths. She was stunned and tired enough not to care. It was such a relief to have the climbing over. She had always been fighting and struggling for something beyond her. That was foolish, and she would never do it again.

She was surprised that when she tried to speak it was a little hard to keep back the tears. But Harold was standing there like a statue, and she did not want to exasperate him by keeping silent.

"You asked me a little while ago why I was afraid to marry you," she said. She bit her lips to steady them. ". . . Now you know. . . . It was n't to spare you. I'm as 'good,' so far, as any one. It was just to spare myself. It was because I know what the world is, and what I might expect, and I could n't bear it — after we were married, and — and — you had had your way, to be thrown out when you knew."

It hurt her to say it and the tears filled her eyes. Harold winced and moved uncomfortably. His mouth opened, but it seemed as if there were no words in it.

"No, listen to me," she said, and he sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I am different from you," she went on. "I know it, and I was afraid of you. I was afraid of your mother, and your father, and your whole world. You know I am not a child. I have seen nearly all the misery that life can know. My mother showed me that. She kept me safe, but my child eyes saw what she could not hide. And she made it my lesson. I was hers and she loved me, and all the good in her she put in me. She taught me her lesson and mine. . . . That is what every mother wants her child to do — to begin where she ended, and go on, on — And it is so cruel when God throws each one back to the beginning."

She said it very simply, without looking at him, standing there before him, her hands hanging at her sides.

"She was n't really a gipsy, but she came from the eastern part of Europe and she wore big bracelets and earrings and was very dark, and they called her that. When she came to this country she was young and pretty and strange, and when her father died they put her in a café to sing. There were other women there. That is all I remember — of the first — that music — jingle, jingle, clang, clang, and the fall of money on the tables or on the floor, every night for years, it seems to me. She used to take me with her and put me on a pile of rags in a corner out of the way. We were both of us dreadfully dirty.

“ And then we traveled, and everything came — that ought not to have come — even when I was working and we had honest money. And she was always wishing that she could die. It was terrible. Because I loved her just as if she were all right. But she thought I should be better off without her. . . . I used to buy her decent clothes and make her clean up. But she had n't the knack of staying clean. She would take a new dress and wrap it around a dirty bundle. Once, when I was little, she stole an old trunk, and she had n't half enough stuff to put in it, so when she was singing out in the camps she used to lay me in it to sleep until she was ready to put me to bed. Often I used to stay there all night. When I was naughty she used to take me by the hands and dance me around in funny dances until I stopped crying.

“ She could n't stand it to be lonesome. She wanted to be always talking. And she always quarreled with women. In the camps she played cards and cheated the men. She always started the fight and they were glad enough to let her go. Then, as you already know, she was killed two years ago in a wreck, when she was coming to me. . . . Some way I seem never to miss seeing those women with old, bright ribbons around their necks, and old thin feathers on their hats and old rags of handkerchiefs squeezed up in their hands.

“ If you had been what I was used to, that sort

of man, I should have remembered the lessons, but you are so different, Harold. God always catches us unawares. . . . That's the reason life's lessons don't do any good. And these months, how bitterly I have blamed my mother! — not for what she was but that she should have got me here. Nobody has a right to do that. Life is too cruel. She tried to be good to me and I loved her, but I have always suffered; at first because I was always tired and too hot or too cold, and then because she would n't be decent and clean, and now because I have lived at all. If I had a child I would rather it should die than have it suffer what God has sent to me."

She slowly turned back to the battered old dresser and began again absently fingering the edge of the soiled cover.

CHAPTER VII

A GAIN it seemed to Kaleema that Harold would never speak. But still she did not care. Still the feeling of rest and relief was with her.

As for Harold, he sat staring at her, but his brain seemed to have stopped. He had not heard all that she said, and of what he did hear he got very little of the poignant meaning. His anger had abated, because considerable time had passed, and also because she was quiet and did not attempt to force the issue. That was all her truth and simplicity meant to him.

Finally he moved, and she knew he wanted to say something but the words were sticking in his throat.

"What sort was your father?" he managed to get out at last.

She gave a little low laugh. "What sort would you imagine?" she said.

She had never had any illusions concerning her father. She wondered if, even yet, Harold did not understand. His adolescent wisdom had always doubted her because she did not belong in the category where his lot was cast, but it shrank from fac-

ing the worst of things. She pitied him with all the maternal instinct in her as she went on.

"You see," she said, determined to open wide his eyes, "I really had n't any."

Again there was silence. And again his brain was standing still. The impetuosity of his boyish need for companionship had let him mingle with cheap girls and share their fun and sympathy and take their friendship and buy their cigarettes, but it had never revealed to him that he would suffer through them.

Then she heard him get up and come toward her. He stood very close, but he did not touch her.

"Kaleema, what will become of you?"

"I don't know. What becomes of most human beings?"

"You can't be human and be . . . always good."

"Good!" It broke from her in a desperate cry as she turned and faced him. It was his nearness that wrung it from her, and to have him stand there without touching her. "Good! What does it mean, anyway? Oh, I'm not good! I'm only afraid of the degradation. I know it so well — so well!"

She turned back to the dresser. What was the use of talking to him!

Suddenly he seized her and kissed her until her breath was nearly gone. When finally she lay weak in his arms he raised his head and looked at her ex-

ultingly; then gave a little nervous laugh because she was so sweet and so like a frightened child, and he loved her.

"Don't! — don't touch me!" she gasped.

"Why?" said Harold.

She wrenched herself free from him and went over to the bed and picked up her hat.

"Because," she answered, putting her hand to her lips to keep back a groan, "because I love you and you have made me tell you so! And because I am lonesome, and because now it is only a step to hating you, and — and to killing you —"

She put on the hat and picked up her gloves and coat.

"'Leema!"

"Don't! For God's sake, don't!"

She got the suitcase and went to the door and threw it open.

"'Leema, we are going to be married just the same."

"Unless you are sure," she answered, "don't come. I am going to Chicago to-night. You know where to find me there. Don't move! Stay where you are. A train leaves in a few minutes. I am going alone to the station. You stay right where you are."

She turned to go out, and her hand was on the door to close it.

"'Leema, won't you say good-by?"

She put down the suitcase, turned, and went back to him. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

Then she went out and closed the door.

Downstairs the office was deserted. She found the landlord and told him the manager would pay for her room. She asked no advice about trains, and the old man watched her suspiciously as she picked up the suitcase and left.

None of the company was in sight. She knew that Sarah was keeping them away from her so that she could be alone with Harold. She wanted to see Sarah for just a moment, but she was afraid that if she looked for her she would see Harold again. She knew the others would understand that she could not endure to say good-by.

At the station she found that in an hour she could get a slow train and go to the junction, and she was glad that she could wait for the through train there. It seemed such an eternity until half-past ten, when the through train was due, and probably it would be much later. Even that first hour seemed as if it would never end.

Every time she heard a step outside on the snow she thought her heart would stop beating. She wondered if Carney were in his room at the hotel. She wondered if Harold believed what she had told him about the train's leaving immediately, or if he would come to find out for himself. After she

had been pacing the waiting-room for half an hour she heard another step outside and, turning quickly, saw Carney pass the window. He stamped the snow from his shoes and came in.

"I saw you leave the hotel and knew you would have to wait an hour for a train," he said.

While she was pacing the forsaken station, he had been walking the narrow floor of his room or sitting with his face buried in his hands. He had meant to go to her just a few minutes before train time. Then, at the end of a half hour, he could stand it no longer and, almost breathless, reached the station in five minutes. Of course it was none of his business. But over and over and over again that scene at the hotel kept running through his mind — how Harold had sat silent, his face livid, while Adam James staggered to his feet and Kaleema talked to him and then took her suitcase and went upstairs. When he got to that sight of her he would close his big hands and walk still faster.

"I have brought you down a little money," he said.

"Money!" exclaimed Kaleema.

He took out the money and a receipt for her to sign. He had remembered all the details. He counted out forty dollars. She could scarcely believe it.

"What has happened?" she said. "How did you get it?"

"Take it," said Carney.

"Has it made trouble for you?"

"See here, 'Leema, do you take me for a fool? I have a little something to say about this show."

"Yes, you have," she muttered; "about as much as you have about the weather." She signed the receipt and took the money.

Carney folded the receipt and put it back in his pocket. An hour later he burned it over his lamp and threw the ashes out of the window. That was the best he could do to stand between her and her misery with Harold.

"Oh! but I'm glad to have that," said the girl. She had pulled out the "grouch bag" and was stuffing the money in. "Carney, if it gets you into trouble—" she began, but he interrupted.

"I'm nearly through, myself," he said.

"Poor Sarah," said Kaleema. "She would like to be honest. Think of living with Skamon all these years!"

There were so many things that they wanted to say. But back at the hotel Carney had made up his mind not to linger. Why should he?

"Well," he said, "you know what address will reach me in New York, and if I can ever do anything for you—" He could not finish the sentence. He had been afraid before he started that this would be the way. He walked over to the window.

Kaleema followed him. Unashamed tears were in her eyes.

"I can't say good-by to anybody," she sobbed, "but I would like to. Tell 'em—"

The man could not speak. He put his arm around her shoulders and put his hand against her cheek.

In the distance they heard the whistle of the train.

He wondered if Kaleema had any idea of what being with her these months had meant to him. He thought grimly that no one would ever know as well as he did how true she had been to her love for Harold. He remembered last night, when he had gone back to her dressing-room after every one else had left, her apparent desperate loneliness and yet the swift repulse of his advances.

Then it came to him that he had determined not to stay until the train came.

"Good-by," he said, pulling himself together. Three other people came into the waiting-room. He shook hands with her and patted her shoulder; then he went out and started to walk across a great unbroken stretch of snow.

Kaleema did not see him leave the station. By the time she had dried her eyes and got her suitcase out on the platform the train was in, and she hurried aboard. Then she looked out of the window.

But Carney was not there. A terrible homesick-

ness seized her. It seemed as if she could never stay on that train and feel it bearing her away. Carney, the towns and their busy streets, the beautiful woods, the giant trees, the pretty roads, the fields of green or of glistening snow, the sunsets, the air and sky — everything free and fine that she had ever known seemed to have turned its back on her.

She covered her lips to keep back a cry, and the long-fought tears came. How she wanted all those people that she was leaving — even the wretched little Giniven child! As the train pulled along she sat with her face buried in her hands, regardless of the curious, staring people in the seats near by, sobbing as if her heart were breaking.

PART II



CHAPTER VIII

“**M**OTHER, it is a telegram.”

Though the girl tried to keep her voice calm, it nevertheless sounded somewhat unsteady. The family was rather high-strung.

When Gertrude had chanced to see the messenger just going out of the door she had intercepted the maid, and that much quicker got the dreaded thing into her own hand. It was addressed to “Mrs. Joseph Lloyd Barton,” and Gertrude went hurriedly into her mother’s room to deliver it.

Mrs. Barton turned from her desk, took the telegram, then in her haste dropped her glasses on the floor. She did not wait to see if they were broken. Gertrude impatiently picked them up, but her mother was already fumbling with the envelope and a lorgnette. Finally the envelope was torn open and Mrs. Barton read the message.

“What!” she exclaimed, and sat staring at the paper.

Without further ceremony Gertrude seized it.

“Good heavens!” she gasped, and looked, wild-eyed, at her mother.

Then she read the message aloud, to be sure that

they had both got the same meaning. "Was married this morning. Start home to-morrow."

Mrs. Barton and Gertrude stared at each other.

"Mother!" exclaimed Gertrude; then again, "Mother!" She looked at the telegram again. "Sent from Chicago. . . . Had you the faintest idea?"

"Why, certainly not," answered Mrs. Barton impatiently, indignant at the suggestion. She took the telegram back into her own hand. "When it came I knew it was from Harold, but I supposed he had been killed or was dying."

"In that case he would not be sending telegrams," said Gertrude curtly. She hated shocks in the family. Usually they were in some way connected with her father's crankiness, which set all their nerves shivering. This was a new kind of shock.

Again Mrs. Barton reverted to the telegram, as if with sufficient persistency more information could be squeezed from it. Her lips were set very tight, with a white streak of excitement around them, and one of her slippered feet was nervously trotting on the rug.

Gertrude pulled up a chair and sat down. They were both too confused for continued speech. Mrs. Barton began tapping her lorgnette on the letters and bills scattered on the desk. This was the first time in two months that she had even opened the bills, and she had been upset enough before the tele-

gram came. She and Gertrude were still staring vacantly at each other.

"I don't believe it," said Mrs. Barton. That was the way she disposed of many annoying things. She was a very pretty woman, plump and very young-looking when one considered that Edna, her oldest child, already married and divorced, was thirty years old.

"Well, here's the telegram. You don't think he has lost his mind?" said Gertrude.

"He certainly has lost it if he is married," was her mother's cheerful rejoinder. "That boy! I'm so shocked, Gertrude, that I can't think rationally."

"He is twenty-five," reminded Gertrude. She was twenty-three, and was far from considering herself a child. She was, though, more capable and better poised than Harold. He was the petted one of the family.

"And to think that he never — What will your father say? I am positively afraid to tell him. Can we get Lloyd by telephone? I must talk to him. That was sent this afternoon. They start home tomorrow. Who on earth has he married?"

"I told you that he was lying when he went away," Gertrude said suddenly. "And he lied the last time, too, for that matter. Don't you remember when he went West before?"

"Yes, I do," admitted Mrs. Barton.

"He has n't business that takes him to any place but Pittsburgh, to see Mr. Thomas. And last November he simply snapped when I asked him where he was going. He's acted queer all winter," continued Gertrude, "and I told Edna so, but as usual she did n't see it. Perhaps if we had paid more attention to the simpleton we might have saved him some nice trouble."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Barton, following her own trend of thought, "that I ought to go and tell your father. Is he in his room? . . . But I can't believe that it is true, and I don't like to get him excited for nothing. He will be offended if I don't tell him, though."

She rose abruptly. It was very apparent that she did not expect much comfort or support from the interview.

"Why, Gertrude, I can't think of a soul—"

"Neither can I," interrupted Gertrude, knowing perfectly what her mother was going to say. "Anne Thomas would never marry him that way."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Barton. "Besides, he has n't treated her decently for a year. Telephone to the club and ask if your brother Lloyd is there. But don't tell him until I come. I always supposed Harold would marry Anne. She has so much money, and he knows perfectly well that he has n't a cent to his name."

She picked up her handkerchief that was on the desk, stopped by sheer force of habit before a mirror, and then went to her husband's room.

It was an apartment up in the Eighties, East, in which they lived. It was expensive, of course, but it was just as inexpensive as they could possibly find of the required size and location. Evidently there was money somewhere in the family. There was. And in a most awkward place, too.

Twenty-six years ago it had belonged to Grandmother Barton. By that time in her life she keenly appreciated what a spoiled and selfish creature she had made of her only child, Joseph Lloyd Barton. She loved his wife and their two children, Edna and Lloyd; and when she died her adored son found to his horror and everlasting chagrin that she had left him her jewelry, silver, pictures, and her once grand but now shabby furniture, but had bequeathed every cent of her money and every scrap of her property to his two little children. The old lady's heart was in the right place, but quite unintentionally she did two very unjust things: she did not leave her son's wife, whom she dearly loved, so much as a pin, and she entirely overlooked the fact that more babies might arrive.

The upholstering was the worst that ailed the old mahogany furniture. And this Mrs. Barton had spasmodically changed and repaired as best she could on her husband's income. He had stepped into his

father's law office but not into his father's shoes, and the firm paid him for his name rather than for his brains. For some time these, such as they were, had seemed to be softening. Now for days he seldom went near the office. Instead, he stayed at home and bothered the servants and tortured his family.

Edna, now thirty, and Lloyd, twenty-eight, came with glorious independence and completeness into their money when they were of age. But they were thrifty and had always lived on their incomes, which they well might, considering the size of them. Lloyd got through college and then started in on a life that seemed chiefly to require his eating as much as he could, with the result that he was very soft and fat, and looked about played out. Although Edna was two years older she looked ten years younger. She had already been married, to a pompous Judge Gibson, but he had made her very unhappy, and none of the family blamed her for leaving him. One tyrant on their hands was considered enough. At present she was engaged to Arthur Haydn, a young novelist who earned a decent living. She and Lloyd bore the greater part of the household expenses, for they adored their mother and loved their home, and nothing but matrimony could induce them to leave it. Mrs. Barton was utterly devoted to her children. She neglected every outside interest for them and would break any

engagement if they asked her to go with them for any amusement or to do them a favor.

There was an especially sympathetic spot in her heart for Harold and Gertrude, the two little stragglers. She admitted that perhaps the lack of patrimony would be best for Harold in the end, but it was hard on both of them and not quite fair. Ever since Harold's first college days she had been banking on Anne Thomas. The families were lifelong friends, and the girl herself was adorable. Motherlike, she had Harold's life all planned out for him. Only, motherlike, she had forgotten to tell him about it; and she quite overlooked the fact that whether he was shut up in his room, just a few rods away from her, or was downtown in his office or exploring strange places such as she never dreamed of, his life was developing and his brain working quite independently of her. The surprise was so sudden that the shock left her stupid.

Mrs. Barton tapped at her husband's door and without waiting for an answer opened it and went in. She stood in actual fear of him, he was so childish and unreasonable.

"My dear boy," she began, "I have just had a telegram from Harold." She always tried to be good to her husband and assuage the jealous misgivings of his brain.

It was about five o'clock and he had come back from his afternoon walk only a short time before.

A red carnation was in his buttonhole. He was a good deal of an old dandy. He was tall and thin, with full eyes, introspective, suspicious. His mustache had been skilfully touched with dye and waxed; the lips beneath it were loose and full, and, when he was alone, kept moving. He would sit by the hour, his head down, silently talking to himself.

He grudgingly put down the magazine he was holding, as his wife drew up a chair. Of course Harold would never think of sending the telegram to him.

"He says that he was married this morning," she went on.

For a moment there was silence.

"I suppose the rest of you knew all about this before," was his opening observation.

"My dear boy, no!" exclaimed his wife. "Certainly not. I was never more astounded in my life."

"Oh, that's all right, Nellie," he said with grieved dignity, strumming his fingers on the magazine.

"My dear boy, ask the children," she insisted, laying her hand appeasingly on his sharp knee. "Ask Harold himself when he comes home. Perhaps Lloyd and Edna knew,— I have n't seen them yet,— but Gertrude and I did not.

By that time his curiosity was getting the better of his dignity.

"What has he married?"

"I don't know. I have n't the remotest idea. He simply says that he is married and starts home to-morrow."

"Where is he?"

"Chicago."

He sneered his disgust.

"Well," he threatened, "if he has done anything outrageous he'll regret it. He'll hear from me."

"Wait until we know," she answered consolingly. "And we must not forget that fate has not been very kind to Harold."

"Yes, and what has fate done for me?" he demanded, hitching himself up in his chair. She knew she had got that started before the words were off her lips. But it was too late to take them back. "At the mercy of my children," he went on. "At my age. Living in a way that *I* can't afford."

"But you and Harold and Gertrude and I could be just as comfortable and happy if Edna and Lloyd had their own homes. There, there. Don't let us worry about that, dear boy."

She gave a last pat to his sharp knee and rose. She never could bring herself to abuse his mother and the two older children, even though she knew that that was exactly what he wanted. Anyway, it was too late now by many years for her to win his good graces. For some unaccountable reason she was the one whom he blamed for all his misfor-

tunes. And his worst grudge against her was her "there, there, dear boy," and the pat on his knee. The poor, nervous woman had done it for years, never dreaming how it exasperated him. He was morbidly jealous of her, too. Yet he had repeatedly threatened to leave her, and the dread of her life was that some day he would fulfil the threat and leave her stranded; for stranded she would be. She had not a penny of her own or any family to turn to, and she never would take money from her children for herself, even should it enter their heads to offer it to her. And it was not likely that the two with money would. They would insist that she live with them, of course (whether she liked it or not), but Edna and Lloyd seemed possessed of a very strong belief in the divine rights of kings and inheritors.

Having accomplished her duty of breaking the news to her husband, Mrs. Barton straightened some of his furniture, patted some of his cushions, and then left. She always so wanted to run from his presence that she habitually forced herself to tarry and bestow these careful attentions. And it just as regularly infuriated the children to see her fluttered attendance on him. But she knew best. There were some things that the children, wise as they were, did not understand.

If ever a woman earned her living, Mrs. Joseph Lloyd Barton earned hers. Only she did not have

the satisfaction of being comfortable while she was about it, for her heart was in her throat most of the time. Often when her husband had been threatening and sulking for days, she would hunt up the maid's duster and vigorously polish his furniture and talk about the weather and having his clothes pressed, trying to convince him that he was not abused and forsaken. If Harold caught her before she got into the room, he would take the duster from her, slam it in a corner, and lead her back to her own room, angrily denouncing his sulking father. She would cautiously close the door and sit trembling until the boy's voice was lowered. If he had had money enough to take care of his mother, he swore there would have been one grand upheaval in the family. He himself was just helpless enough to sympathize with her. And she loved him for his sympathy, though its demonstrations frightened her.

When she left her husband's room and regained the hall she found that Lloyd, in his riding clothes, had returned from the park. He stood by a light, his gaze glued to the telegram, Gertrude, her arms akimbo, standing before him and volubly explaining that nothing could be explained. When his mother appeared he stared at her stupidly, then threw the telegram on a table and walked on into his own room.

The next moment he was back. They knew he would be.

"I suppose he thinks he's a very bright boy," he observed disgustedly, dropping on a chair near the tea table.

Mother and sister remained silent.

"Nice mess he'll make of it on what *he* earns," he added.

A minute later the door-bell rang and Mrs. Gibson and Arthur Haydn came in. Gertrude thrust the telegram at them and then stood back to see the effect.

"Um-hum," said Edna, calmly, staring at her mother. "I hope she has more money than he has. . . . Is n't he a little fool!" Matrimony and divorce had made her very wise and patronizing.

Arthur Haydn assisted her to remove her furs and said nothing, but in the bottom of his heart he was hoping that, for Harold's sake, his wife's money was lacking. He had recently discovered one or two flaws in the disposition of Edna Barton Gibson. And they were caused chiefly by her income.

Then Edna began to laugh.

"Really, it's too ridiculous. That kid! Do you suppose it could be Anne Thomas? I've a notion to call up Pittsburgh and ask if Anne is at home."

"And what will you say if you get her?" demanded Gertrude.

"Tell her the news," answered Edna.

"Much she cares!" exclaimed Lloyd.

"I really think she did like Harold," said Mrs. Barton.

"Then worse and more of it," said Gertrude. "Let's not be ridiculous, but wait until he comes."

"My poor boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Barton. "What trouble has he got into!"

Then Mr. Barton, too curious to stay away, came in and sat down, and the children looked frightfully bored, and Mrs. Barton very punctiliously fixed his tea.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Kaleema walked out of the station and stood in Forty-second Street that January morning, it seemed to her that she had opened her eyes in another world. For the first time in all her experiences of landing there she saw the sky as well as the sidewalk.

The sole purpose in her mind was not the mad search for an expressman to get her trunk across town, hoping she would immediately afterward have to get it out again for another engagement.

It was only a few months ago that she had last stood there, but the buildings and the streets and the policemen all seemed changed. They were not: Kaleema was happy.

It was Sunday, so there was no need for Harold to rush for the office, wondering the while whether or not he would find himself discharged for his absence. He had had permission — grudgingly given — to go, but he had never been allowed to feel too secure, and he was not aware of the fact that it was suspected, and most profoundly hoped, that he would soon be married, and that his mind would then more than occasionally be centered on his work.

Indeed, whatever was erratic in that office was either understood or given permission to depart. It just happened that Harold had made himself valuable and that his employers had taken the trouble to understand him.

He and Kaleema had stopped at a telephone booth in the station while he talked to his mother long enough to tell her that he was in town and would be at home immediately. Kaleema had insisted on that in the train, for she knew how his mother would be worrying.

Her teeth nearly chattered when she thought of Mrs. Barton, though it was only intuition that led her to suspect what sort she must be. Harold had scarcely mentioned the other members of the family, and they seemed so vague that they did not even frighten her. She did not quite realize that they existed. Indeed, he had been very reticent about himself. That had always puzzled her. But she had never asked him any questions. She did not know that he had been a long time perplexed over which address to give her for his mail, home or office. Finally he had given her the office, and his heart was in his throat ever after in the fear that trouble might come of it. She had often wondered if he were already married. But asking him would n't have done any good.

His own nerves were strung to the breaking point. He had arranged that while he went home she

would get them settled for a day or two at one of the cheaper Broadway hotels. A good deal of what little money he had saved had been spent in these wild journeys.

At the corner she took her suitcase and they separated, Kaleema glad enough to be alone for a little while so she could shampoo her hair and make herself pretty. She would have said good-by to him, however, but he darted off like a young deer without a word of parting.

It seemed to Harold that he never would reach home. He expected all degrees of horror, dismay, and scolding; but he had braced himself against them. Now that he had made the plunge, he would face it, and he could hardly wait to get there and have the whole business off his mind. He meant not to gloss things over but to tell the truth — that is, nearly the whole truth. There were one or two little things that they need never know. Such as about Adam James and the dead gipsy. Otherwise, by the time he reached the apartment, he was ready to justify Kaleema to them.

His key was scarcely in the lock when his mother herself opened the door. She threw her arms around him and he bent down and kissed her. He hoped that she was alone. Then she set his bag on the floor and drew him into the living-room, where she could get a better look at her beloved boy. The whole family was present, even Arthur Haydn.

Harold wondered what he was doing there at that hour in the morning. It was no business of his.

Edna was broadly smiling. She never did have any sense, anyway!

"My dear child!" said his mother.

It was not at all what he had expected.

"I should have told you, Mother," he said apologetically, "only I did n't realize it myself until after it was done."

"Were you married looking down the muzzle of a gun?" asked Edna.

"I was not, Mrs. Gibson," he replied angrily. "And let me tell you —"

"There, there, children, don't quarrel," interposed Mrs. Barton.

"Then tell Edna to mind her own business," muttered Harold.

His mother helped him to pull off his overcoat; then she reached up her chubby arms and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Whom have you married, Harold?"

"A little actress, Mother. A nice girl, though."

"I hope you'll be happy, Harold," said his mother, and turned away with a profound sigh.

Harold sat down and rested his elbows on his knees and his head on his hands. The pose was not cheerful. Edna glanced at Harold, but he was staring at the floor. For fully a minute there was silence. They knew he was regretting it already.

"Nice family?" inquired Gertrude.

"No," answered Harold shortly. "None at all."

"Who introduced you to her?" asked his mother.

"Nobody," replied Harold. He did not look up. He could imagine the expression of their faces. Then he went on. "I saw her in a boarding-house in West Thirty-eighth Street. I went there with a chap I know to see another fellow. Awful neighborhood, but the house is all right. She was sitting on the stairs throwing pennies to a hand-organ kid that had come into the lower hall, and then the monkey ran in and she was afraid of it, and it chased her, and we all got to laughing and talking."

Silence followed his explanation. He knew without glancing up that they were staring blankly at him and at one another. Such proceedings were not within the range of their comprehension. Perhaps Lloyd and Haydn had heard of such things. In his mind's eye he saw again very vividly that hot Saturday afternoon — himself off on a half-holiday — the loud music booming in at the open windows as Kaleema ran screaming up the stairs, the monkey at her heels; and he saw her tripping on her dress and falling in a heap right in front of him. He had never thought about introductions until now.

"And you have lied half the time about going away on business?" asked Gertrude finally.

"Yes," replied Harold.

"Is she . . . respectable?" asked his mother.

"Just as respectable as Gertrude and Edna," he replied.

"That helps some," observed Edna, and he knew perfectly well she was grinning.

"Well," said Gertrude very quizzically, "if you were going to marry an actress, why didn't you marry one a little bit well known?"

"Oh, lord!" groaned Lloyd, and he and Haydn began laughing uproariously.

"Are you going to let us look at her?" asked Lloyd presently.

"If you will condescend to do so," answered Harold. Then, to his mother, "May I bring her to see you? She's a little queer."

Haydn and Lloyd thought he would do better to let them find out a few things for themselves.

"Certainly," his mother replied quietly. She was prepared for anything.

Again there was silence.

"We always thought," observed Gertrude after a while, "that you would marry Anne Thomas."

Harold glared at her.

"And go round with her handing out the money for me to tip waiters? Giving me an allowance, perhaps. No, thank you."

He jumped up and swung out of the room.

He went into his own room and closed the door. It looked very very restful and clean. After what he had lately seen, it was heaven.

For a moment he stood still, his gaze consciously avoiding his own eyes reflected in the mirror opposite. Then he deliberately turned and looked at the door, to be sure that it was closed and none of the mild disgust and ridicule he had left outside could pry after him.

The interview just ended was much briefer than he had expected and very different from what he had planned. It had passed in about ten minutes. He had thought that it would last a day. But it had dulled the newness and the strangeness of his marriage. The impulses and arguments that he had been storing up for the past six months would now never be spoken. Even Kaleema seemed five years away. He felt as if he were standing with his hands full of ashes.

He got his bag and repacked it with fresh things; then he went back down town.

CHAPTER X

ON the way down the memories of the past forty-eight hours stung him with rebellion against what he had met at home.

With it came the consciousness that he was going back to Kaleema. And that he wanted blindly, passionately to go.

The family's ridicule and remoteness had viciously torn him out of his wilful dream. It was just what he had expected. Ridicule and remoteness were the intimate enemies of his life.

He put the blame on the bondage of his marriage. Without that he could have loved the girl with his whole soul. It was the owning her and the paying for her out of pride and tradition that dulled the beauty and the strangeness of her and the joy of possession. Without that his world could have moved along unknowing, and he could have lived in full.

When he reached the hotel and went up to the room he found her in her kimono, sitting by the window in the rays of the winter sun, combing her drying hair.

There was no smile on his lips as he went in.

He took off his hat and overcoat and threw them down. She looked at him inquiringly, but he did not return her gaze. Then the next instant he threw off his coat and went to her and pulled her to her feet. She smiled; that was answer enough. This was the longest that they had been separated since that wonderful Friday morning. He thrust his fingers into the cool dampness of her dark, fluffy hair, and she lowered her lashes and ran her hand over the monogram on his shirt sleeve. Then he kissed her, and took the comb away from her and threw it across the room. Then he pulled down the curtain.

CHAPTER XI

TO his surprise, Kaleema refused to go to his mother the next day. She said she was tired and fidgety, and would not Tuesday do? Evidently it would have to; so it was settled that they were to meet at the Knickerbocker as near five as Harold could make it from the office, go to his mother's, and stay just half an hour. Kaleema made him be very definite about that half-hour. She knew that she could not last through a minute more.

"And I hope to goodness she talks all that time about the weather," she said, nervously biting her nails.

"So do I," said Harold, just as fervently. Kaleema gave him a quick little look.

When the time came she kept him waiting. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and he was getting angry when he heard her voice at his elbow. He turned, and then uttered an exclamation of surprise.

She looked lovely, from the toes of her new shoes to the top of her smart little hat — new suit, new furs and all.

"Lord, you're beautiful!" he exclaimed.

"My Gawd, I ought to be," she answered. "I

blew most of the three hundred. No wonder it took two days to do it."

A fat, sporty-looking man who was passing heard what she said and stood still to look at her. A flush of annoyance covered Harold's face. She did not see it. She was too much interested.

"And clean hands," she said, "and a manicuring that makes the search-light up at Highlands look like a dirty deuce in a yellow mud puddle."

The fat man laughed, and Harold, red to his ears, took her arm and hurried her out of the hotel.

Kaleema was smiling in her perfect satisfaction, and she was so beautiful that everybody stared at her. Harold was biting his lips to keep back his disgust and anger. The general effect of her to passing pedestrians was that she must be starring on Broadway, she looked so very happy and just sufficiently independent and haughty. Most of them looked with morbid curiosity at Harold. They wondered where he got all his money. It infuriated him. He wished he had a placard stating that he was her husband. It was the first time he had ever noticed how overly-wise Broadway is; and how it can stare.

"Lots of expensive actors in town," observed Kaleema. "Gee! look at their bored expressions! Ain't it awful to be alive! And d' you get the wrist-watches and the handkerchiefs up their sleeves? I don't know any of them. All my friends are on

the road; comin' away from Skamon or goin' to him. . . . With these clothes on, I wonder if I could ever land a silk-stocking job?"

"You have on a great deal too much paint," said Harold.

"I have not," she answered. "You let my paint alone, little one. Say, would n't it be funny if I got an interview with a ve-ry important stage director and he asked me what I was with last and I raised my eyebrows haughtily and said, 'Dillon and Skamon'?"

She laughed loudly enough to be heard half-way across the street.

Harold's reply was cut short by her turning suddenly and waving a little white-gloved hand at a shabby, dissipated-looking man. It was one of her old managers, and he came hurrying back to them. Evidently he did not owe her anything. Harold was forced to pause.

"I say, kiddo, but you 're lookin' fine!" the man exclaimed, wringing her hand extravagantly. "Workin'?" he asked, glancing at Harold.

"Just left one of Dillon and Skamon's bum shows," she answered. "Out in Dakota. Some jump, believe me. Say, but it's nice to see you! Married last week, too. This is Mr. Barton," she announced, with beaming pride.

"Married!" he exclaimed, shaking Harold's hand, oblivious of the fact that she had neglected to men-

tion his own name. "Say, that's fine! And you're lookin' great. Show business, Mr. Barton? No? Lucky man. Come in and see me, both of you, soon. Talk over old times. I'll bet you're crazy already to get back to it."

"Not when I'm sober," said Kaleema.

He laughed. "Well, good-by, good-by. See you soon. Be sure to run in, 'Leema."

Even after they parted, both he and Kaleema turned their heads and waved their hands. She seemed to be extraordinarily enthusiastic about that shabby, dissipated-looking man! And the creature fairly devoured her with his big black eyes. "Kiddo" and was she "workin'"! Harold was knocking into people in his haste and rage. He felt that they were labeled. "Show people, show people" was what their appearance evidently said. He was finished with that neighborhood when he had Kaleema with him.

Gaining control of his voice, he spoke.

"To say the least, you might take off the earrings."

For a moment she hesitated, and then she meekly pulled them off and dropped them down the neck of her dress.

How he dreaded parading in at home! Thank Heaven, he had told his mother over the telephone that he wanted Hadyn kept out of the way. He

was not in the family yet — not by a long shot — and he and 'Leema were n't going up there for his analytical amusement. He hoped that Edna would n't be there. But he knew she would be.

Kaleema had not the faintest idea where they were going. For all that Harold had ever told her to the contrary his mother might reside in Hester Street. But she went unconcernedly wherever he took her. She had done it often enough before with others, so why be inquisitive now? She had even frequently gone alone into cheap hotels to strange men's rooms and answered their questions about salary and experience and weight and height and wardrobe, and let them measure her to see if she could wear the last woman's tights and boots.

She was seeing things, too, as they walked along. She saw how people looked at her, and knew just what they thought. That was the reason she cared so much for the greeting of the shabby, dissipated-looking man. They had been together for months and months, working and playing together, and he did not think suspiciously about her. He could really respect a person when he had to. She was seeing the lazy, contemptuous, sophisticated faces that judged some things correctly and misinterpreted a great deal more. That seemed to be one of the chief occupations of the taxi-drivers lining the curbs and of those who drifted along the sidewalks: won-

dering cynically what each woman was hunting for — a snub from an office boy, or some fool to pay for being amused by her.

It was evident that they were going uptown. They were in a very good neighborhood and turned into a well-appointed building. The attendants, knowing Harold, respectfully let them go on. Both were thinking so busily about other things that it took them rather by surprise to discover that they had arrived. The quiet maid and the handsome apartment did not fall in very readily with her reflections.

Mrs. Barton met them and held out her hand to Kaleema. Kaleema smiled nervously as she said, "How do you do, Mrs. Barton?" and allowed herself to be led to a sofa. As soon as Harold decently could he fled to his own room and closed the door. Kaleema was thankful to have him go, if he intended to keep up his fidgeting. Only she hoped he would not forget about that half-hour business.

Once closeted in his own room, he recalled that Kaleema had been frankly and sweetly meeting his mother's eyes and answering her questions as they sat there together. And, after all, her paint was all right, and she had n't on any obvious powder. He hoped Gertrude would go in. He wanted her opinion.

If only Edna and Haydn and Lloyd would keep out of the way. . . .

He thrust his hands into his pockets and paced back and forth for ten minutes. Then he opened the door and listened. He heard laughter and many voices. Of course! Edna and Lloyd were there — the whole bunch of them. They seemed to be having a good time with her. . . . Good lord! they were asking her about the shows.

He closed the door and strode back to the window. He began opening drawers and boxes and putting things in order. Then he tacked up a picture that had fallen down. He had not the faintest idea of removing his possessions. A minute later he opened the door and listened again.

“Are the stages ever small?” he heard her exclaim. “Why, some of ’em are so awful that you break the footlights or knock over the scenery every time you faint or get murdered.”

It was time to go, regardless of the half-hour. He hurried across the hall and into the living-room. There they all were, even Haydn, smiling at her in undisguised admiration. She was laughing quite naturally, and her teeth were very white and pretty against her dark skin. She did look lovely. And there was n’t a thing the matter with her clothes.

When he appeared she rose. Mrs. Barton exclaimed that of course they must stay for dinner. By that time Harold wanted to stay. After all, perhaps he had got himself worked up over nothing. He glanced at Kaleema, but she was very charmingly

telling a lie about their having an engagement. Edna came and pulled him aside while the others were talking at the door.

"You know, Harold," she began, "I always was your friend."

Harold jerked away. He did not feel like any of her teasing.

"Harold," she pleaded, "do me one last favor. Her color is beautiful. What kind does she use?"

"I only know," snapped Harold, "that it's fifty cents for a great big can."

CHAPTER XII

WHEN they left the elevator Harold looped his arm through hers and hurried her out into the crisp evening air.

"Where shall we go for dinner to-night?" he said.

"What do you say to one of the little French restaurants downtown?" she answered.

"Very well," he replied; and he ran her along and they slid a few paces on the thin coating of ice that covered the sidewalk.

Harold was whistling.

That was the only sign he ever gave her that she had not disgraced him on that much-dreaded day.

He did not speak once all the way downtown. Neither did Kaleema. She was persistently blinking her eyes to keep back tears. His silence was almost too much for endurance this time.

When they got off the car he took her into a drug store, because, he said, he had forgotten something and must call up a man. Once inside the booth he called up home. He asked the maid for his mother, and she came to the telephone. He cleared his throat twice while he was waiting.

"What do you think of her, Mother?" he said.

"She is very nice, dear," she answered.

"What do you really think?" he said. Her mildness did not deceive him.

"Why, that she is very nice," she repeated with emphasis.

Yes, she was very nice. He understood. She was not Anne Thomas, that was all.

"Please let me speak to Gertrude," he said; and he heard his mother put down the receiver and call to her.

"Hello. Yes?" said Gertrude over the telephone.

"What do you think of her?" asked Harold.

"That she is perfectly lovely, you idiot," she replied.

"Very common?"

"Just a little. Most people are."

"What did Lloyd say?"

"Nothing."

"What did Edna say?"

"Just grinned."

"What did that fool Haydn say?"

"That she is some live wire. Also very natural. He's crazy about her. Says he did n't know you had so much sense."

"Good-by. . . . I say, what do *you* really think?"

"That she is lovely, and that you need n't worry about what anybody thinks about *her*."

“ Good-by.”

“ Good-by.”

He always knew that he would get the truth from Gertrude.

The little restaurant was crowded, but at last they found a table for four with two places left. Two very young men were there already. Kaleema smiled at them as she sat down. She began smoking and tried very hard to talk to Harold. He was unresponsive and sat gazing around at the uninteresting crowd. Evidently the two boys were rather shy; and besides, she was afraid Harold would not like it if she talked to them. Two or three times she rubbed her handkerchief over her eyes and said that the smoke kept getting into them.

She kept Harold there as long as she could; then she suggested a picture-show. After that she wanted a nice long walk, so they walked until Harold was tired. They were hungry again, so they went and ate something. It was very late when they got back to the hotel.

Up in their room she was a long time getting her outdoor things off, her waist and skirt removed and her kimono on. The things did not seem new any more. She carelessly hung up the suit and hat and threw the furs into their box, forgetting to put on the cover. The earrings had worked down inside her corset and were pressing into her skin, but she did not feel them. By that time Harold was

ready to open the windows and put out the light.

"Go ahead," she said. "My head aches, and for a little while I am going to curl up in this big chair."

Harold looked at her stupidly.

"Sit up?" he said.

"For just a little while." She turned away from him. She had fought to her limit against the tears that filled her heart and were flooding to her eyes. She was struggling to love him just the same; but there alone with him the hurt was so keen. She clenched her hands, then opened them and pushed back her loosened hair. It seemed to her he would never put out the light.

He came over and kissed her. Her teeth were closed very tight for the long breath that his lips were pressed to hers. She kept her eyes closed, but her pride made her smile when he raised his head and looked at her. He should never, never know.

He was dreadfully tired. He hated to walk, anyway; and he was soon asleep.

When morning came she was still curled up in the chair, and she had been awake all night. It was the longest night that she had ever lived through. At the end of it some of her joy was gone and some of her pride was broken. She understood even better what it means to forgive.

And, with the tears on her cheeks, she had decided that she would not have another headache.

CHAPTER XIII

HAROLD had decided that what they wanted was a cheap furnished apartment, with a room outside for a maid; and after two days of diligent searching Kaleema found on in West 104th Street.

The first day that she was hunting she found the rents preposterously high.

"And for nothing but a hole in the wall," she explained to Harold at night when she met him for dinner.

"I believe," said Harold, keeping his gaze on his plate, "that you might have better luck if you did n't wear the earrings."

Kaleema stared at him; then a comical expression crossed her pretty lips and she burst out laughing.

"My conscience," she exclaimed, "you're a wonder! The earrings don't go with a marriage license, you mean?" She propped her elbows on the table and tilted her chin on her hands. "Say, Harold, you don't know it, but you're a genius. You have n't any sense about stage-stuff, but unconsciously you've stumbled on the psychology of make-up. It's a big wedding ring and a sad expression that the janitors treat kindly. Not too sad, because

they'll think that every morning you come home with a skinful and scratch up the door trying to find the key-hole. Wait till I get made up for to-morrow!" She leaned back and put her hands on her hips. "I'll leave off the paint and the earrings and carry me left glove in me hand and wave the ring at the janitor's nose, and perhaps I'll go to an old ladies' home and rent a mother-in-law to take around with me. They ought not to charge more than fifty cents a day for the use of her, if she's returned in good condition. Awful, though, if she tripped on a pin and broke one of her brittle old legs!"

She was waving her left hand in the air to illustrate her intention, and three waiters were appreciatively listening to her. Harold could not help laughing, though he hated to do it; then he glowered at the waiters, who promptly turned their backs but remained where they could hear everything.

"You'll see us all settled by to-morrow night, Harold Barton, everything peaceful and in order as if we'd lived there ten years, and with me two old trunks out of storage and the contents scattered all over the floor. Gee! it'll be fun to get into those trunks. I've got some fine cowboy stuff — pistols and all that — that real cowboys gave me and I've used in melodrama, and it'll be great nailed up on the wall in the kitchen. We'll keep the rest of the place sort of decent and refined. I'm goin' to quit

readin' the 'Clipper'—all about joinin' on wire, and tellin' all in first letter, and how much do you weigh, and how many teeth of his own did your great grandfather have when he was buried; and I'm goin' to begin readin' these pretty magazines all about houses, with pictures how they should look and how they should n't. We'll fix it up the way I always thought *Camille* and *Lady Windermere* would have theirs—not the way those rummy stage managers are satisfied to have it, with red plush furniture with the stuffin's fallin' out of the chairs and sofas and hangin' down for the audience to look at. It's no use to bother with whiting on your neck and arms and good clothes, when half the time there are n't any sides to the scenery and the company is standin' there makin' faces at you, and the furniture's enough to make *Othello* die laughin'. Imagine sinkin' languidly on a chair and not knowin' whether it's goin' to hold you or whether you're goin' through to China. I've worked in the 'Merchant of Venice' when there was a Navajo blanket under the jewel-case and a colonial rag-rug on the floor. And then they expect the company to get atmosphere! We get it—from the stage hands after the show! And the 'Clipper' says, 'Played to good audience.' Gawd, how that thing can rave if you advertise."

To the regret of the waiters, business called them away.

The next morning, before Harold was dressed, she was in a Childs restaurant hastily swallowing some breakfast. She met an office-boy from a theatrical agency whom she recognized, and she recounted to him her recent history. He was quite civil to her when he found out that she was no longer at his mercy. He even wanted to know if her husband could give him a better job — more money. "Perhaps," she said. "Anyway, I won't forget you," and then to herself, "No, I won't, you little beast."

She ran down the subway stairs and made straight for "the Hundreds." She looked all right to-day, she was sure, but something was wrong. The first building she went to had an elevator, and, aside from being too expensive, the elevator boy was surreptitiously finishing his breakfast and was haughty. She decided that, in her haste, she was too early; so she retreated to a drug store and waited half an hour. After that she met with more respectful receptions. Before noon she had found the place she wanted. She unfortunately called it a flat, and the janitor's wife, who was showing her around, corrected her. Otherwise the janitor's wife was very friendly, for evidently this lady had no airs and would not presume on a person if she came into the building. It was n't generally known, but the building belonged to a rich man who had a furniture store over in Third Avenue, who when he wanted to get

rid of some of the stuff he was tired of looking at furnished some of the apartments. In that way he disposed of the furniture and got more rent. And furthermore, the janitor's wife hinted, it was not generally known, but just the same, if she liked a tenant she let her go through any apartment that might be vacant and help herself to whatever small pieces she wanted.

Kaleema's eyes glistened. That would be as much fun as buying things, she reflected. She assured the janitor's wife that she and her husband were perfectly honest and that they would like to move in before night. The janitor's wife was not accustomed to quite that degree of haste, and she intimated something about references. Kaleema gave Harold's business address, as he had told her to do, and explained their hurry by the fact that they were at an uncomfortable hotel.

"Bride, are n't you?" suddenly asked the janitor's wife.

Kaleema was surprised; then she laughed.

"Well, I suppose so," she said. "I was married last week. I had n't thought of calling myself that."

The janitor's wife gave her a curious look. She did not doubt her, but she saw that she was unlike most other brides. The struggles with life and with Harold had robbed her of that.

Finally it was agreed that Kaleema should go

directly to the agent and beg him to do his best. She went, and to such good purpose that the lease was signed shortly before six o'clock. She had already got the two trunks out of storage and had left them with the expressman. After the agent's interview with Kaleema he was inclined to have his suspicions, founded chiefly on her haste; he sent a man to investigate Harold, and the office was so respectable and Harold so disagreeable that all doubts as to his being responsible were quickly removed.

At half-past six Harold and Kaleema met in the flat. Harold would not take the time to go and look at it before signing the lease, so of course he was disappointed and heartsick when he saw it. It was so different from the Eighties, East. He forgot all about the difference in the rent. The outside and the entrance were bad enough, with the imitation marble, but once inside his own door he stood rooted in the tiny hall. Kaleema was watching him closely, and she saw his disappointment.

"Must be an awful respectable place," she observed, "the fuss they made about lettin' us in. Good thing they looked you up instead of me."

"That would sound fine to a stranger," exclaimed Harold.

"Well, I'm not talkin' to a stranger, am I?" she answered. "What do you suppose they would think of some of the joints I've lived in?" Harold

frowned. "The furniture here now is a fright, but the janitor's wife likes me already, and you won't know the place in a week. And I'm goin' over to the store itself and tell the man how homely the furniture is for his swell building."

"No, you don't," snapped Harold, but when he looked at her he saw that she was laughing and just talking to tease him. She was trying to make him forget for a moment to compare things.

"Oh, you silly!" she exclaimed, seizing his hand and kissing it and pulling him on into the apartment. "I know, dear," she added, "that it is not like your old home; but there may be some things in the world nearly as good as money."

There was a living-room, with ugly lace curtains at the windows, and in the middle of the floor a mission table; there were a cheap leather-covered couch, a cigar stand, some nameless chairs, a desk and a hideous brass lamp, a dull green rug and three dreadful pictures. Next to it was the bedroom. This was almost pretty. It had white paint and pale blue striped paper with a rose border, a brass bed (it had been in the store eleven years) and white bureau, chiffonier and chairs. Back of the living-room was the dining-room. It had an oak set with many bumps and claws.

"This furniture looks as if it had muscular rheumatism," said Kaleema as they stood in the door. "If those claws ever start to walk away with

it, I'll open the front door and the back door and let it go."

Then she pushed Harold along to see the bathroom and on into the kitchen.

"Could n't swing a cat by the tail in here, but the last woman left a prompt-book." She held out a greasy cook-book for his inspection. "I spent two dollars in carfares and telephones getting this place, but this book must have cost that, and now we'll not have to buy one. Really, all that is needed to complete the whole flat is a piano and a corkscrew. But there's no place to stand the piano, so we'll just get the corkscrew."

Harold stood looking around, his hands in his overcoat pockets. Then he walked back into the living-room. He looked at the squatty brass lamp and curiously felt the leather cover, with its painted Indian, that was spread on the mission table. Still he could not believe that this was his home.

As they expected the trunks and suitcases any moment, they could not leave the apartment, so Harold went out and got some sandwiches and cookies, and they ate those for dinner. Then it was ten o'clock before the expressman came. Harold was tired out with waiting, and Kaleema seemed to be until the door-bell rang. Then it was as if she had heard the whistle of the approaching train after a long night wait at a junction. She jumped up and opened the door, turned on the lights, and the

next minute she and the expressman were laughing over the problem of what to do with the furniture so that the three trunks could be got inside the door. Harold was so horrified that he went into the bedroom and stayed until the expressman was gone. When quiet was restored and he issued forth, he beheld a trunk in each of the other rooms. The suitcases were on the dining-room table.

"Don't worry to-night, dear," said Kaleema. "This seemed to be the only thing to do, and I promise you that one trunkful of rubbish is to be thrown away."

Harold let it go at that, and soon he was in bed. He heard her pottering around and knew that she had already unlocked the trunks.

"Coming, 'Leema?" he called,

"After a while," she answered. But it was four o'clock the next morning before she was through.

While they were waiting for the expressman she had planned exactly what she was going to do; namely, that before Harold ever entered the apartment again some of its ugliness should be gone. That night, while he was sleeping, she emptied the three trunks and refilled to overflowing the oldest one with the stuff that was to be thrown away. It took her a long time to do it. Nearly everything that she picked up, smelling of grease paint and smeared with it, too, was a sort of treasure, but finally the trunk was full and locked. The rest of

the stuff — costumes, wigs, fans, shoes, poison bottles, masques, crowns and ropes of jewels, old parts, tights, boots, pistols, powder, rabbits' feet, boys' knickerbockers and artificial flowers, and more besides — the whole lot, she threw on the kitchen floor and closed the door on it. She meant to sort that out some other time. Then she went to bed.

As soon as Harold left the next morning she had the old trunk taken away. Then she went down town, drew a part of her money, and did some shopping.

When Harold came home that night he again stood in the tiny hall and stared.

Not a trunk or suitcase was in sight; and the living-room was transformed.

The ugly lace curtains were down, and some plain, sheer ones were in their place; the pictures were not on the wall, and the brass lamp was gone. The ugly desk was disguised by being left open and having a dull green blotter, that matched the rug, put on its lid, with ink, paper, and pens. The mission table had been pushed over so that it hid the worst of the fireplace; the leather cover with its painted Indian was gone and in its place was a strip of beautiful dull silk that the Gipsy had once worn for a sash. On one side of the table were three new magazines, and on the other a little black lacquer ash tray and some cigarettes. Over the cheap-looking near-

leather couch was thrown a huge velvet mantle that Kaleema had worn when she was playing the queen of something, and it luckily had faded so beautifully that it harmonized perfectly with everything in the room. It was tucked neatly in at the back so that it would not slip, and at one end was a big velvet cushion that the same queen had kneeled on when she was arguing with the king about not having her head cut off. The worst of the cigar-stand was hidden by a large fern. Three splendid white chrysanthemums were in a dull green glass vase on the window sill, and above them hung a picturesque willow cage with a cheerful canary hopping about inside. The chairs had been changed and were quite plain.

When he had seen this, he went into the bedroom. It looked very pretty. White covers were on the bureau and chiffonier, and his and Kaleema's toilet things had been cleaned and put in place. The prettiest of her pictures and keepsakes were put around, and here and there was a touch of bright color.

Kaleema was not in sight, and he turned and went back toward the dining-room, where the same sheer curtains were at the windows and a concoction of lace and linen and a fern in a low dish moderated the hideousness of the rheumatic table.

When Kaleema heard him coming she opened the kitchen-door and came out, closing the door after

her. She was smiling happily, but she had already learned better than to expect anything encouraging from him.

He caught her in his arms and hugged and kissed her very enthusiastically.

"It looks fine," he said. "You must have worked like everything."

"But the kitchen is a fright still," she said, laughing happily. "We'll simply have to go out for dinner."

Kaleema put her hand on Harold's shoulder, leaned her cheek against his arm, and surveyed with love and pride the result of her day's labors.

"There's a woman upstairs," she said, "who has always wanted that lamp and the Indian, and the janitor's wife traded with her for those decent-looking chairs. It is n't exactly the boudoir that *Camille* would fix up to 'boude' in, but it's home."

Home! The word jarred through his brain. He pulled himself together enough to bend down and kiss her hair where it lay against her forehead, then he turned into the little hall to take off his overcoat. A ghastly smile was on his lips. It was home, and it was all in order now — except the kitchen. The mediocrity and definiteness and eternity of it nearly suffocated him. He arranged his hat and gloves and shook out his handkerchief to make time to get control of himself. He had made up his mind that no word of regret or complaint should ever pass his

lips, and he set his teeth hard upon the resolution.

“Put on your things and we will hunt up a restaurant,” he said kindly. He saw how bright her eyes were and that her cheeks were flushed with happiness and excitement.

It did not seem to enter his head to wonder where she got the money to pay for the cage and the canary and the curtains and flowers and other things. Perhaps he thought he had given it to her.

CHAPTER XIV

IN the Barton family it never rained but it poured. Mr. Barton was usually responsible for the pouring. In this instance he certainly was.

He insisted that the rest of them had known all about Harold's marriage long before it occurred, and he took it upon himself to be very much hurt over it, while at the same time he developed an insane jealousy of his wife and a college friend of Lloyd's, from Boston, who was in town just then and at the apartment a great deal. He wanted to talk and complain about his grievances, and it hindered and annoyed him to have a stranger around. At the bottom of it all he was intensely curious about Harold's beautiful wife, and he thought the others were purposely not telling him all they knew. Whenever he caught the family alone, he took advantage of it. On these occasions Edna and Lloyd would sit in contemptuous silence while their mother did her best to explain things and pacify him. Gertrude, being still dependent on him and helpless, would leave the room in a vain hope that she might escape his resentment.

He went back to his old threat of leaving Mrs. Barton and giving her a thousand dollars a year to

live or die on. He did not say much about Gertrude, but he hinted ominously that many modern girls were earning their own living and relieving their fathers of care and anxiety. Mrs. Barton was very much worried, though she tried to remind herself that this had often happened before and had blown over.

During that first week after Harold was in his own apartment, he spent every possible moment of his time at his home in the Eighties, East. He would get up there about half-past five o'clock and sit in his mother's room, to get away from the others, until dinner was announced, and then he would straggle up to 104th Street. He did not talk very much, but would make an attempt at reading or would listen to his mother's anxieties — anything, it seemed, just to be near her.

When he did not go there in the afternoon he usually went in the evening. The first day he appeared there he wrote his apartment address on a slip of paper and pinned it to the pad on his mother's desk, and he put his telephone number on the telephone card. But he evinced no intention whatsoever of transferring his things. On the contrary. He had always been orderly about his room, and after he had fussed around in there for a few minutes he would make it neat before he took his departure. He had taken away only a couple of suits of business clothes and other necessities, but not one of his treasured possessions.

Gertrude went into her mother's room and discovered him on his first appearance there since he had brought Kaleema. She was surprised. She stared at him, trying to read his composure.

"Are you looking for an apartment?" she inquired.

"Not now," he replied. "We're in one."

"In one!" she repeated in amazement. "Furnished?"

"Yes."

"Servant?"

"Hardly — in one day."

"That's so. I don't see how you even found the apartment so soon. Can she cook?"

"Not yet."

"Decent apartment?"

"Oh, it's all right."

"Where is it?"

"One-hundred-and-fourth Street."

"Does your wife like it?"

"She seems to."

"Well, for heaven's sake, why don't you talk and tell me something?"

"Well, what shall I say?"

"I should think there would be a lot of things to say."

Harold opened the magazine he held and began reading, and Mrs. Barton shook her head at Ger-

trude. Mrs. Barton herself had never asked him a single question. Gertrude shrugged her shoulders and went out of the room.

On his third visit the family looked inquiringly at one another as the door closed behind him five minutes before dinner was served.

Edna was the first to speak. She put her chin in the air and looked very wise.

"I don't believe he is married to her," she said.

"Yes, he is," said Lloyd, putting down the stub of his cigarette and walking across the room. "That's what ails him." He went over and squared himself before his mother. "What does he say to you, mum?" he asked, as if defying her to keep anything from them.

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Barton.

"Really?"

"Really."

"What do you think about it?" asked Edna.

"That he is like a poor, foolish fish out of water," answered Mrs. Barton.

"Don't you ever ask him any questions?" said Gertrude.

"No."

"Don't you think you ought to?"

"No."

"Don't you think some of us should?"

"No."

"I think it would be easier for him if we did."

"He got into it without our assistance, did n't he?"

"Yes," admitted Gertrude.

"Then let him get out of it the same way."

It was easy to see what stand she had taken. For a moment there was silence.

"Are you ever going to see her?" asked Gertrude.

"Yes, very soon," replied her mother.

"Hoping that she will not be at home?" said Edna.

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Barton. "I shall telephone first. Harold shall never be able to complain of the way his mother has treated his wife."

"That's sensible," said Lloyd.

"So you have made up your mind?" said Edna.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Barton.

Gertrude had made up her mind, too. Only she was n't talking about it.

"He will stay with her just about six months," said Lloyd.

The maid announced dinner, and that Mr. Barton had just rung and said he wished to be excused.

Without a word Mrs. Barton rose, went to his door, tapped and went in. A look of unspeakable boredom was on the faces of those she left behind.

"Are n't you feeling well, Joe?" she asked, as she went to him.

He did not answer. He sat with his hands clasped in his lap, his loose lips moving. In his button-hole was the red carnation.

She put one hand on his shoulder, the other on the arm of his chair and bent over him. That was what made the children shudder. It would not have been so hard if she were not so young-looking and pretty. He began twisting his waxed mustache.

"Are n't you feeling well, Joe?" she repeated.

"Yes, I feel well."

"Then what is it? Has something gone wrong?"

Again he did not answer.

She pulled up the little rocking chair and sat down. For perhaps a minute she did not speak.

"Why don't you tell me what has happened?" she asked.

"You must think, Nellie, that it is very pleasant for me having that Boston man around," he said.

She had known all the time that that was his grievance. Now that he had condescended to mention it, the atmosphere could be cleared.

"That boy!" she exclaimed. "I, a woman fifty-six years old and he the age of my son! Dear, that is n't sensible! Now is it, my dear boy?" At this point her hand began patting his sharp knee, "Just because he treats me politely—as if I were his mother. It's ridiculous, perfectly ridiculous! How do you ever get such things in your mind?"

"You need n't talk to him," he interrupted.

"Certainly I must be nice to him. Have n't I always been nice to the children's friends? My dear boy, you never acted like this before!" (But he had, often.) "Come, now, to dinner, and forget it. This is so ridiculous — when I have never thought of anybody but you in all these thirty-two years."

"You must realize that it is very humiliating to me, Nellie," he harped.

"Fifty-six years old, and he the age of my own son!" she reiterated. "Come, now; the dinner is getting cold. Nobody here but the children."

She patted his knee and rose. Still he sat there sulking, and still she coaxed and argued and consoled, until finally he got up and followed her.

CHAPTER XV

AS Mrs. Barton had admitted, she had made up her mind about her attitude toward Harold's wife. In pursuance of her determination, she telephoned about noon on the last day of that week to tell Kaleema that she was coming to see her if she would be at home in the afternoon.

Kaleema spent the intervening time in a state of smothered agitation. A servant had been obtained, but had left on the second day after her arrival. A trunk for her to stumble over in the small kitchen and Harold's coming home for an eight o'clock dinner got on her nerves. So Kaleema had got out the abandoned cook-book and gone to work. The dinners she cooked were very good, for she followed the directions accurately and intelligently, as she went about stage business.

She had already packed one trunk with treasures and sent it down to the store-room, and the one left in the kitchen was full of things to be cleaned or made over and used. After the cook left, she had bought eight magazines about housekeeping and dressmaking, and during the day the kitchen was a sight to behold as a result of her activities. After Harold left in the morning she got to work, and she

did not put things in order again until it was nearly time for him to come home. Then, of course, one day he came home right from the office and found the trunk open and things in a mess and her battered old make-up box standing on the kitchen table.

"I wish you would throw that junk away," he said. "I don't want to see any show stuff again as long as I live."

He took off his overcoat and walked away. Kaleema suppressed a smile, threw things back into the trunk and went about the dinner.

That day, half an hour after Mrs. Barton telephoned, everything was where it belonged. She threw away the old chrysanthemums and hurried out and bought fresh ones; then she dressed with great care and when that was safely done, put on a great all-over apron and dusted the whole flat.

She hoped and prayed that Mrs. Barton would come alone. After that first meeting she had a distinct impression of each member of the family, just as she always had of a new company after a first rehearsal, and she knew that criticism was uppermost in their minds. She fervently hoped that she need never set eyes on any of them again, all the time knowing that she must see Mrs. Barton, at least. Probably the others would remain in the mist which had heretofore shrouded them.

At 4:15 Mrs. Barton arrived alone, and remained half an hour. She was very kind, admiring the little

details of pleasant coziness in the apartment, talking about housekeeping, and advising her hostess of the best ways to get a maid. She did not once mention Harold. Indeed, all personalities were quite omitted from the conversation. Kaleema spoke once of Harold, but immediately felt that Mrs. Barton preferred not to include him in their conversation.

When she left, Kaleema was puzzled. The first thing she did was to take a look in a mirror; then she surveyed the apartment; then she stood in the middle of the living-room trying to convince herself that Mrs. Barton had been very agreeable.

Harold came home early that night, and she told him about his mother's call and how nice she was and all the pleasant things she had said. He made no comment, but she did not expect he would. She had given up talking to him and simply talked at him, laughing and rambling on as she had used to with people who were more responsive. After dinner he said he must go out for a little while to "attend to something." When he reached the apartment in the Eighties his mother at once told him that she had been to see his wife and thought her a very nice, likable girl, and that his home was very pretty. Harold said nothing, but he went home earlier than usual.

When he arrived he found Kaleema cutting out something from a pattern. He laughed at her dress-making, and then he took the scissors away from

her and pulled her down on the couch beside him. He kissed her lips and eyes and pretended to bite her ears; he took the hairpins out of her hair and shook it down over her shoulders, rumbled it up and buried his face in it. Kaleema was biting her lips, trying to get them steady enough to say something. She took his beloved head in her hands and held it in her neck so that he could not look at her.

"Some way," she said, "since your mother came here I feel more as if we — were married."

The tears came into her eyes in spite of her. That was such an exasperating habit of hers. She held his head close so that he should not discover them. Her heart was aching to have him say just the right thing.

"Nonsense," came in his muffled voice.

"I mean it," she said. "It seems sort of queer. You never scold about anything, and you don't talk and you never clutter up the flat."

• She did not sound quite through, but she ceased speaking. That was all that she could bring herself to say. The little close, common, everyday things that were lacking she could not name. She tried to blame herself, too, for being strange, but she could not conquer her feeling.

"Then I'll rave and tear around," he said.

Her answer was a little laugh. Then he went on.

"And you never — seem to — quite — forget everything, either," he said.

“I want to, though,” she whispered. “I want to.” She let him put her head back and look at her. After all, she was not just his mistress.

CHAPTER XVI

DURING the next week two unexpected things happened. A maid came and remained, in spite of the trunk, and on Friday afternoon Gertrude Barton appeared.

Moreover, Harold stayed at home more. He did not bring any of his things from his old home, but he behaved a little less like a transient in 104th Street. Not one act or word of it was lost on Kaleema. It made her intensely happy, but she said nothing because she knew too well his boyish contrariness. For a day or two they had a little fun together, reminiscent of the times of the hurdy-gurdy and the escaped monkey—the short time before he began to want her and to make her miserable. She suddenly grew more beautiful than ever before, and Harold saw it. He acknowledged to himself that the flat was pretty, too, and that she was a good housekeeper. Kaleema hurried downtown to the bank and drew out more of her money, and took some old things to the clever but obscure little dress-maker who formerly had made the best of her stage clothes. The nervous clutch had left her heart and brain. If there was any of the undercurrent now, she was too happy to know it.

She was boundlessly happy — with the happiness that her whole nature had dreamed of and cried for. She no longer felt strange and guilty when she made herself look her prettiest and waited to hear his key in the door. Now he was happy, she believed, and their life could be lived without fear. Often when she was alone she would put her hands over her eyes and remember that the time had come when she could forget. And Harold could forget, too, thank God: that was the best.

But the undercurrent was there. Two or three times he caught sight of some of the old things which had surrounded her before they were married and which he had so often seen in her room in the cheap boarding-house or in her dressing-room when he went to her on the road. He came across a rabbit's foot, her make-up lights and some photographs of her friends. He hated the sight of them. There was the shabby, dissipated-looking man, Sarah and Godiva — others that he had only seen and a lot whom he did not know at all.

One night as he came in he heard her singing in the bedroom, and when he went to the door he found her before the mirror, grease paint in each hand, making up her eyes. When she saw him she dodged into the closet, laughing, but he pulled her out and looked at her. It was very manifest that he was angry.

"I was doin' it just for fun, Harold," she ex-

plained, "to see if I had forgotten how to do both eyes at the same time."

He walked out of the room and she smothered her laughter in a towel and began rubbing the make-up off. But his annoyance had the best of him, and in a moment he was back and stood in the doorway, his hands in his pockets.

"I wish, Kaleema," he said, "that you would throw away that trunk."

She stopped rubbing and stared at him, the towel in mid-air and her eyes smeared with black paint.

"Which trunk?"

"That one in the kitchen."

"My Gawd," she said slowly. "A perfectly good guaranteed fiber trunk. Say, Harold, are you crazy? Just between ourselves, are you crazy?"

He turned on his heel and walked away, and she turned back to the mirror, and between the look of disgust on his face and the smear of black paint on her own, it was too much for her and she burst out laughing.

Then the next instant she was seized by a sickening regret. It seemed to her that she was always doing the wrong thing. She was always laughing when she should not. And life had been different lately, and she so much happier.

She quickly cleaned her face and went into the living-room where he was reading a newspaper, leaned over the back of his chair and kissed him.

He continued reading, and she put her hand over his eyes and kissed him again and held his head close to her. He did not speak or move. The kisses meant nothing to him. Not even the warmth of her neck against his face brought any memories.

"Is it very cold out, and are you tired to-night?" she said.

"Certainly not," he replied.

She turned to the pretty willow cage and began playing with the canary. She should have been more careful. But why must all the happiness be forgotten?

That evening he went out alone after dinner.

The next night he left for Pittsburgh to see Norman Thomas on business. Several of the Thomas investments had come into the office through him and the firm trusted him very largely to look after them. It meant a great deal to him, both in the office and with Mr. Thomas.

Norman Thomas was a powerful and wealthy man; the families had always been friends, and he had liked Harold from the time when he was a young boy, and Harold and Anne had played together. Now he liked him even better, for he had turned out to be a clear-cut sort of fellow who knew his business and attended to it. Harold realized this, and was doing his best to keep the respect and confidence of this important man.

Friday afternoon the bell rang, and when the maid opened the door Gertrude Barton walked in.

Kaleema was sewing, struggling with a dress that had just come home from the dressmaker and was all wrong. The flat was in disorder, and her heart skipped three beats when Gertrude appeared.

"I am so glad you are at home," said Gertrude. "I did not telephone because it might have put you to some bother if you intended going out. What a sweet little place! Oh, the bird cage and the canary! Where did you get it?"

"Just bought it — at Macy's."

"Is n't it sweet! Do you care if I get one just like it?" She stood gazing in rapture at the bird.

"Certainly not," laughed Kaleema. "I'm so glad you like it." She stood staring at Gertrude's back.

"Don't let me hinder you. What are you doing?"

Kaleema explained. Gertrude wheeled around and investigated the difficulty.

"And it's a perfectly beautiful dress," she exclaimed, holding it up for inspection.

"Two old ones put together," said Kaleema, very meekly.

"No!" ejaculated Gertrude, sinking on a chair and staring round-eyed at Kaleema. "Well, you're not fixing it right. Give me a needle." She took off her hat and threaded the needle. Here was some-

thing quite different from what Kaleema expected. "Your dressmaker must be perfectly wonderful!" Gertrude said. Her surprise was very flattering.

"She is just a cheap one," said Kaleema.

"Would it be awful if I asked you for her address?" inquired Gertrude.

Kaleema laughed outright. "Of course not," she said. This was the first intimation she had had that the Bartons could be what she called human. She wrote down the address, and the next moment she herself was talking at random. "I went over all my old stuff and what was n't worth fixing over into something decent, I've thrown away. Here's the address, but I'm afraid you'll be shocked at her place."

"Never mind, if she's only cheap," said Gertrude. "Yes, it's an awful neighborhood, but she's a wonder. You are awfully nice. Some people won't tell a thing about their dressmakers. I can't understand it. I think it's mean and cranky." Kaleema agreed with her; and Gertrude put the slip of paper in her purse and went on sewing. Kaleema stood watching her, not knowing what to do. "If you will rip this, the whole thing will be finished and hung up before I go home," Gertrude suggested.

Kaleema pulled up a chair and began to rip.

"Other things nearly finished?" asked Gertrude.

"All but one waist, and I shall finish that tomorrow," she replied.

"May I see them before I go?"

"Of course. They're all thrown into my trunk. Everything in it is in order, though. . . . I don't know why, but Harold hates that trunk."

"Oh, I suppose so," commented Gertrude. "Those two boys are awfully spoiled. I pity their wives. And Arthur Haydn has found out already that *he* is going to have his hands full."

Kaleema looked at her from the corner of her eye, but said nothing. She was just beginning to get her wits together. She had not supposed that Gertrude was so different from the rest of the family. But Gertrude did not leave much time for reflection. She talked almost incessantly; personalities, too. For the first time there seemed to be something real about the Bartons. Soon she branched off to social service.

"Do you know anything about settlement work?" she asked.

"You mean — slums?" said Kaleema.

"Yes. That is, trying to make them less slummy."

"I've read about them in magazines," said Kaleema.

"Come over and help us at the settlement where I go. The neighborhood is horribly overcrowded and the people are so discouraging. Some of them are dope-fiends and most of them drink and they

are all desperately poor and usually tell lies. Don't you want to come and help?"

"Have you ever noticed that you improved any of them?" asked Kaleema.

"No, I can't say that I have," admitted Gertrude. "But if they do improve they move into a better neighborhood and some more messy ones take their place."

"Then why do you bother with them?"

"Perhaps it's just to patch up my own conscience," said Gertrude. "I have often wondered about that myself."

"And after you have been seeing that terrible misery all day," said Kaleema, "you go home hating yourself because you have enough to eat and steam heat and a clean bed to sleep in. Don't you?"

"Yes," said Gertrude, "that is just exactly what I do."

"Certainly," said Kaleema. "That's what you pay for being foolish enough to get born with a heart in you."

"But how do you know?" asked Gertrude.

"Oh, don't ask me the how or the why or the because of anything," answered Kaleema. "All I know is that I never yet felt hopeless or rebellious myself that I didn't see — right on the street — something so terrible that I was sickened by my ingratitude."

"What — what kind of a something?" ventured Gertrude curiously.

Kaleema glanced at her, then back at her work. "Oh, sometimes just a face, with the punishment of living in its eyes." She was careful of what she said. Gertrude's clothes were so smart and her gaze was so wide.

Gertrude felt her caution. "Don't you want to come and help?" she persisted.

For a moment Kaleema was silent. "But what could I do? I've seen so much misery all my life, I'm afraid of more," she said finally.

"Perhaps you could do a great deal just because you could understand."

Kaleema bit her lips. "Nobody can help them," she said, "when they are once down." She did not want to refuse and she did not want to go. The little apartment was her heaven, and she was so ravenous for its happiness that she wanted not to let a thought or memory of misery come in.

"Yes, we can help them," insisted Gertrude. "Anyway we should do the best we can."

"And that's not much, I'm afraid," said Kaleema. "We can't create work for them, and some of them would not get out of their condition if they could."

"That's because they're so much like children."

"You don't know," said Kaleema.

"Perhaps not," said Gertrude, "but if they were

as wise as we are they would n't be where they are. And then there are the children."

"Yes," said Kaleema, harshly and bitterly, "the children — the devil's revenge."

Gertrude stared at her. "You — don't like them?"

Kaleema was breathing quicker. "They make me shudder," she said. In her ears was ringing the memory of the whippings of the Giniven child.

"Oh," said Gertrude slowly, "you don't want any of your own?"

Kaleema's lips were white. "More than anything else in the world," she answered.

"Then why —?" Gertrude stared, puzzled, but Kaleema hurried on.

"Because I have nothing to give them, and because, when I have suffered — failure, misery, and . . . and all — I have blamed my mother so bitterly for getting me here. She should not have forced life on me. It is wrong — wrong. Earth can be such hell. And she knew it. I could n't bear to look at a child of mine. God only knows how they suffer — and yet are afraid to die!"

Gertrude was silent. There was something in Kaleema's face that kept her so. The next instant Kaleema was ashamed of having spoken.

"I should n't say such things — to you," she said.

"Perhaps I understand more than you think," answered Gertrude. She was remembering her

father's threats and the nights that she had lain awake wondering when the crash would come and how much money she could earn and what work she could do. "How about blaming your father, too?" she suggested.

"Would if I ever thought of him," Kaleema answered. "Trust me for blaming the whole bunch of them — even God."

For a few moments they were silent. Finally Kaleema spoke.

"I should be satisfied," said Kaleema, "if I could help just one — just one."

In her voice there was an intense longing. Gertrude wanted to look at her but did not dare.

"You will, sometime," she answered.

Kaleema did not reply. Presently she went on:

"It must be horrible to see — some of those people in their ignorance and helplessness suffering for the cruelty and stupidity and vileness of the others. There's no power that gives the grown ones justice and they take their spite out on the children, and often the children get frightfully burned and maimed and ill-treated, and their fathers and mothers beat and torture them — God! why does n't somebody kill them?"

She gave a short, hard laugh and shut her eyes as if to keep out the horror. Gertrude shuddered. She looked at her and saw that her lips were white. Kaleema continued:

"You can go just so far to help them and then the law stops you, does n't it?"

"Not always," protested Gertrude.

Kaleema closed her lips tight, Gertrude thought to keep them from twisting in the agony of memories. What else was in her mind Gertrude never knew, for she put down the scissors and shook out the dress, perhaps to keep her nervous hands from clasping.

"Well — I'll go with you, and do my best. There, is n't this done? I can never thank you enough for the way you have helped me to-day."

"Just let me help you again," Gertrude answered. "I love to sew."

"I don't," said Kaleema, going to hang up the dress.

Then she took Gertrude to the trunk and began pulling out the things. Gertrude admired everything, and it was after five o'clock when she went home. Just as she was leaving she hesitated a moment at the door. Kaleema felt that there was something that she was trying to get up the courage to say. Finally she said it.

"Would you just as soon," she began, "tell me what your name was before you married Harold?"

"It was West — Kaleema West," said Kaleema.

"And you always will be Kaleema West, just yourself, won't you? No marriage can change you."

Kaleema stared at her, wondering how she knew. Then Gertrude went out and closed the door.

It was agreed between them that some day the next week she should come again.

Harold got back to town Saturday morning. He went directly to the office, and from there, early in the afternoon, he went to the Eighties, East.

He was thankful to find his mother alone. Leaving his suitcase in the hall, he went into her room. He had not been there five minutes when she knew that there was a strain. Not one look or action of his in her presence ever escaped her. She had always cherished such high hopes for him that she considered his hopeless marriage had nearly broken her heart. But she never said so. She was just waiting.

"Did you have a successful trip?" she asked, when he came in.

"Yes, very," he replied. "Business could n't have turned out better. Mr. Thomas was perfectly satisfied."

He had sat down, but he got up again and, his hands in his pockets, began alternately looking out the windows and walking about the room. Though he tried to make his words calm, she saw the tension in his face.

"Did you go up to the house?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"Did you see Mrs. Thomas and Anne?"

"Yes."

"Anne as pretty as ever?"

"I suppose so."

His mother smiled indulgently. She did love her tall boy.

"Is she still in love with you?"

"I don't know that she ever was."

Mrs. Barton laughed. "She ought to have been, anyway."

Harold did not even smile.

"Where are they going this summer?"

"To California."

For a moment there was silence.

"Did they ask any embarrassing questions?" she asked.

"No, for I told them to start with that I had married out of the circus."

"Harold!"

His breath came heavily and he walked over to a window and stood with his back to her. She looked at him wonderingly, but did not speak. Then the strain broke. He could endure it no longer.

"And they had sense enough not to ask any questions. I am not the only man who has married outside of his caste."

That was his first utterance of self-justification. His mother's hand tightened on the book she held.

"Will the Thomases be in town this spring?"

"Next week. Mrs. Thomas and Anne."

"What are you going to do by way of returning your social indebtedness to them?"

"I?"

He turned and looked at her.

"Yes."

His lips tightened and he turned back to the window. In his pockets his hands were twitching.

"Perhaps," he said presently, "when I have a few millions —"

"Courtesy does n't wait for millions," she interrupted. "Simplicity is the best kind. And a discourtesy is never overlooked by a man like Mr. Thomas."

His hands were still twitching.

"You are going to ask them for dinner, or something, are n't you?" he asked presently.

"Yes," she answered, "but that does n't excuse you. You are indebted to them over and over again socially and in business."

"That does n't matter now. I am down and out." He crossed the room and went to another window.

"Oh, Harold, don't say that!" she exclaimed.

Then he came and stood before her, his face drawn, looking like a helpless, hopeless child again.

"Mother, why did I do it?" his dry lips said.

"Harold!" she exclaimed softly.

This was the first time in all her motherhood that

she had been unable to give one of her children comfort.

He looked at her beseechingly. He wanted to fall down on his knees and bury his head in her lap and implore her to help him, just as he used to do, with blind confidence. Up to this time she had always saved him; she had never failed.

She wanted to take him in her arms, and her heart ached to be able to tell him that it was nothing but a bad dream. She never forgot those helpless words — “Mother, why did I do it?” and that she could give him no answer.

He turned away, for there was a choking in his throat.

“My poor boy,” she said, “why did you?”

“Oh, I know why,” he said bitterly. “I know why.”

He set his teeth and paced the floor.

“It’s because without money life’s so rotten, and girls like her don’t care. It’s not the money they care for. It’s something else. She can work herself like a slave — and be happy — and ask for more. And it’s worse than you know,” he said. “I think —” and he knew he was a cad to say it — “I think Mr. Thomas did have plans. He looked all upset when I told him, and he stopped talking about something big that he was going to put into my hands. I suppose they know a dozen fellows — just like me, only not fools like me. He’ll give it

to one of them. Perhaps — perhaps I might have had enough money so that I could have stood it to marry Anne.”

“Stood it?” repeated his mother. “I thought you cared for her.”

“I did — in a way.”

He came back and stood before her, hopelessness, regret and uncertainty stamped on his young face.

“Well,” he said slowly, “it’s all over now.” But his imploring eyes still looked to her for help.

“You know best, Harold,” she said. She did not meet his eyes.

He flung himself down on a chair and buried his head in his hands. She was so thankful that at last he had spoken.

“Gertrude went to your apartment yesterday,” she said.

Harold looked up. “Well, I want Gertrude to stay away from there,” he said. “And please tell her so.”

He got up and went back to the window.

Presently he put on his hat and overcoat, took his suitcase and went out.

CHAPTER XVII

HE hurried down the street and struck into the park. It glistened, for it was covered with a thin coating of snow. He could not endure the thought of a street car. It was already dusk, and a car would be filled with its glare of light and with people.

For some time his mother remained sitting just where he had left her, a bright spot of excitement burning in her cheeks.

Her first impulse was to find Lloyd or Gertrude, but it vanished as suddenly as it came. Her developed sense of caution returned to her, and she remained quiet, but for the nervous motion of her slippered foot on the rug. She could scarcely believe her own hearing that he had said so much, and beyond even that she knew there was more. Every day after he left she had gone into his room and looked around to satisfy herself that he had taken nothing away. She had begun herself attending to his mending, and he brought it home and tumbled it into her lap as if he were a child with big holes in the knees of his stockings. She was very glad that he had spoken. Ever since he had come back mar-

ried she had been watching the hidden worry in his face and feeling the eloquence of his silence. Every minute that he had sat in her room, listlessly talking or reading or half-asleep, she knew that he was longing for her to touch on that one thing; but with a stubborn cruelty she had been silent. She loved him too selfishly to help him.

It was with selfishness now that her eyes glistened. He had shown her his misery. That was the first step on the road back home.

Harold had not walked five minutes before he was cursing himself and his face was burning. Out in the fresh air and the park's cold quiet he had met his broken resolution.

He was breathing hard and blaming Pittsburgh and Mr. Thomas and the luxury of Anne and her home and its appointments and trappings. He was calling himself a dog and a fool and a traitor. He knew, now that it was too late, that he should have stayed away from his old home. After cutting himself off, he had no business to be hanging around there. He had made his bed and it was for him to lie in it.

He wanted to get to a telephone. He shifted the heavy suitcase to the hand that was not so cold and walked faster. Through the trees in the distance he saw a light that he surmised might be some building and he made for it. It proved to be a little restaurant, and he went in roughly, put down his

suitcase, and without asking permission picked up the receiver. The woman in the place started to remonstrate, but something in his voice stopped her.

When the bell rang Mrs. Barton sprang to her feet. She knew instinctively who was there. She answered without waiting for the maid.

"That you, Mother?" His voice was hoarse and trembling.

"Yes."

"Say, Mother, for God's sake forget what I said."

"Very well."

"Don't say 'very well'! Say you'll try."

"I will try," she repeated dutifully.

"I'm not a cad," he said.

"I have already forgotten it, my child."

"No, you have n't! Have you already repeated it to somebody else?"

"I have not, Harold."

"Well, don't. Not as long as you live. Not to a human soul. I don't know what ailed me. I did n't mean a word I said. That's the truth. You believe it, don't you?"

"Yes."

He hung up the receiver. His mother paused a moment before she turned away. It was natural that he should be sorry. But it was said.

He gave the woman a quarter, took the suitcase, and was gone.

Kaleema was there almost the instant his key touched the door. She took the suitcase from him and dropped it on the floor, and he held her very close while he kissed her.

She leaned back and looked at him. "You have been away forty-seven hours," she said, "and it has seemed like forty-seven years!" She put her warm hands over his cold ears and leaned her head on his shoulder and closed her eyes.

"Want to go to a show to-night?" he said. He was striving heroically to retrieve what he had done.

"Do I want to go to a show? Do I *want* to go to a *show*?" she repeated, and then she dashed into the bedroom and clapped on a hat.

He followed. "Aren't we going to have any dinner first?" he said. He was hungry.

"Certainly we are," she answered. Then she seized him by his coat and whispered impressively in his ear. "The maid is still here."

"Well?" he said stupidly. He was accustomed to having maids remain.

"Well!" she repeated mockingly. "Why, she must be half-witted, of course. It's to be hoped she doesn't go perfectly crazy and put poison in the food."

"Don't you get any references from these people?"

"I do not. Because their references would prob-

ably be worse than their faces. Take an eyeful of this one and you 'll understand."

By this time he was in his shirt sleeves, and when he went to the washbowl she stood so close to his elbow that he could scarcely wash his face and hands. She began poking her finger into his ribs. That always made him splash his shirt.

"Say," she shouted above the running water, "what do you suppose happened yesterday? Your sister was here."

He buried his face in the towel.

"Did you hear? Yesterday your sister was here."

"Gert?" he asked. Then he regretted the unnecessary implication of a lie. But he did not want her to know that he had already been home. She would be happier to think that he came straight to her.

"Of course," she said. "She's perfectly wonderful, Harold Barton. She's the most wonderful person I ever knew."

She was very impatient as she stood waiting for him to emerge from the towel. Ever since the door closed behind Gertrude she had been longing for him to get home so that they could talk about that wonderful visit. He prolonged the rubbing.

"Do you really appreciate how pretty and perfectly splendid she is?" she inquired.

"Gertrude is all right," he answered.

"And was n't it lovely of her to come and be so nice?"

"You have made me wet my shirt, Kaleema," he said peevishly.

"Well, put some alcohol on it and shut up, cry-baby," she advised, and turned on her heel and went into the dining-room.

When he followed her he noticed for the first time that she had on a new hat. It was of an exquisite shade of green velvet, and it was tremendously becoming. In it she was very striking. He waited until she left the table, and then he called after her:

"Put on the other hat, kid; it's more becoming."

She turned and gazed at him, her hands on her hips.

"For th' love of Mike!" she ejaculated. "Would n't that trip a snake!"

He lighted a cigarette.

"Don't flatter yourself that you're foolin' anybody. What's the matter with th' lid?"

"Nothing at all," he answered calmly.

"Only with me and the earrings in it, it is enough to stop the cars."

She took it off and went into the bedroom. From there she called back to him:

"You must have been goin' with a queer lot of people this winter and you're afraid somebody will take me for one of 'em."

"I have been thinking of nobody but you this winter," he answered.

There was silence for a moment while she put on the other hat.

"It gives me a pain," she said, "to think of the innocent things I've sacrificed to keep you in a decent disposition. If you had married somebody who wanted to fight, she would n't have had long to wait. Funny, ain't it, that what gets by in a man's sweetheart strikes right to his nervous system when she's his wife."

She consoled herself with a little more paint, and then Harold went in and told her how pretty she would look if she would rub a little of it off.

For an instant she stood between laughing and crying, and then she burst out laughing. She rubbed her hands hard over her cheeks, and then she turned to him.

"All right now?" she said.

He looked at her closely.

"Yes, dear," he answered.

"Vaudeville to-night, Harold?"

"Anything you like," he said.

He loved her much more in the smart little black hat. He slipped on his overcoat and went into the dining-room to wait while she put on her things.

The memory of the afternoon had almost ceased to trouble him. The regret and guilt had nearly evaporated in his heroic attempt at atonement. It

was a cold night and he was tired. Besides, he hated vaudeville.

He was already storing up new resolutions. He would stop going home. As he resolved it, a terrible homesickness clutched him. He would not even telephone. He would learn to get along without the conveniences and keepsakes in his old room. He would live like a man who had been shipwrecked. He would deal with Mr. Thomas in a strictly business way. If Mr. Thomas did n't like it he could go to somebody else. He would never go near his house again. He would never see Anne or Mrs. Thomas again. He would drop all of his college friends. He would forget everybody he had ever known. He would n't even think east of the park again. When he had got thus far he raised his head and looked around the dining-room and the living-room. He detested the color of the walls. But it was not worth while spending the money to change it. No telling how long he would be there. Then suddenly he bit his lips. He remembered that he had just resolved to spend the rest of his life there. The apartment was cheap and hideous. It was useless to spend money trying to fix it. It was cheap and hideous from the first foundation stone.

Kaleema was slow, but he was n't cross about it.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT the theater they ran into a big surprise. While he was standing in line at the box-office window she dashed away from him, and when he caught sight of her she was on the other side of the vestibule talking to George Carney.

She was very gleeful, and Carney's kind eyes were smiling down on her as he answered her vehement questions.

A look of extreme annoyance came into Harold's face. He did n't like Carney. Carney did n't like him any better.

Kaleema was gasping in regret and amazement at the news that the combination of her departure and de Bassonville's presence had really closed the show.

"Where are all the folks?" she demanded.

"The Skamons went to Kansas City," he answered.

"And Godiva?"

"I left her sitting by the stove reading Christian Science."

"I hope it worked. And the bum legit.?"

"He got a job out there to cut ice."

"While he's dickerin' with Frohman and Brady,

and waitin' for 'em to send a orchestra to escort him to Broadway, like a Italian politician. And the Ginivens?"

"They struck another show."

"Through that damn 'Clipper,' of course."

"Of course."

"And dear old John, and Charley, and Sam?"

"Dear old John got very drunk and sprained his ankle, and Charley and Sam came back with me. Sam opens here to-night."

"What!" she gasped.

Carney laughed and nodded. He was thinking how pretty she had grown since she was married.

"Here? In this theater?" She leaned back and gazed at the garish architecture of the vestibule. "My Gawd! It's Broadway."

Carney laughed outright.

"What luck!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I'm so glad. Come on. The show's begun. Come and see Harold just a minute."

Harold, on the other side of the vestibule, had been watching them, and when Carney raised his head their eyes met. It was too late for either of them to draw back now. Kaleema was already making for the other side, and Carney set his jaw and followed her.

He had always admitted that Harold was handsome, but he had never missed a mite of the weak-

ness that was in his face. As he went toward him all he could think of was the way Harold had looked, back there in Dakota, as he sat on the edge of the table, his face livid, while Adam James staggered to his feet.

When he reached him and they shook hands, he tried to remember that, after all, the boy had married Kaleema. Carney set his jaw harder, and he wondered if she were happy. The thought came into his mind that if she were not he could walk up to Harold and strangle him with one hand.

"Are you doing anything yet?" asked Kaleema, to break the awkward silence.

"Just boxing a little for two or three weeks," he answered.

"Not fighting!" said Kaleema. Some way she hated to think of him as doing that. "Or training some lanky white hope?" she added.

Carney smiled. "That's it; training some lanky white hope," he answered. "One of the clubs thinks that it has a pretty good man, and they have turned him over to me for a while. It's better to do that than be in town with nothing to do."

Kaleema remembered that he seldom used slang. She was suddenly glad of it. She observed from the corner of her eye how very good-looking and well-groomed he was and how fine his teeth were. She was glad of that, too. Not that she liked him any

better than when he was road-worn, along with the rest of them, but she knew that none of those details would escape Harold.

"May I come to the gymnasium some day?" she asked.

Carney went red to his ears.

"If your husband is willing," he replied.

"Neat way of getting rid of me," she observed.

She opened her little bag and took out one of her cards to give to him, and she flushed prettily as he held it in his large hand and looked at it. She was very proud of those little engraved cards, and this was the first one she had used.

"Our address is there," she explained, with an elaborate little flourish of her hand. "You will come to see us, won't you?"

"Thank you," he answered.

"Come soon. I want to talk over old times — just this winter, but they seem so far away."

She saw the muscles harden in his cheeks.

"Thank you," he repeated. He was very conscious that the invitation was not echoed by the glum boy at her side. "I'm afraid I am keeping you from the performance," he added. "Sam's act is down about the middle of the program."

He took a program out of his pocket, opened it, and handed it to her; then she and Harold went inside.

When he was alone he looked again at the little

card. He started to put it in his pocket, then he tore it into tiny bits and dropped them on the floor.

He did not want a vestige of memory of her that he could force from him.

Kaleema could not focus much of her attention on the show. She was thinking about Carney. It was just like him to be working instead of hanging around Broadway waiting indefinitely for another show. He was a thousand times too good for the show business. Even if he stayed in it, he would never succeed. That she was sure of. She wondered if he ever would come up to the apartment. She was very sure that he would not. The certainty of it made her long to see him. Somehow, she felt as if she had known and loved and trusted him all her life. She fell to thinking about that last night in her dressing-room, when he had started to kiss her. She remembered that she had wanted him to do it, too. That was the worst of it. She remembered how she had hurried out of the empty theater, not because she was afraid of him but of the something indefinable. She realized now that she had been more afraid of herself than of him. And all the time he was looking upon her as little more than a child. It was strange. She began wondering over it.

Somebody on the stage missed a cue. She nudged Harold. He was half-asleep.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"The prima donna missed a cue and the act hit the ceiling. That's all. Go to sleep again if you want to."

When Sam's act came she sat up nervously straight. The man he was working with was remarkably like him. They were both tall, slim young fellows, with a good manner, and in faultless evening dress. They had some good songs and a refreshing lot of jokes. Kaleema had not known Sam could sing at all, and her heart jumped into her throat as she wondered what sort of mess he was going to make of it. She soon knew. They went about their work with a finish and ease and spontaneity that held from the beginning. The act was amusing; it was charming. They got call after call. Kaleema suddenly found that her hands were desperately clutching the arms of the seat, and she felt as if for fifteen minutes her heart had ceased beating. Then she broke into wild clapping. Then she took out one of the cards from her little bag, scribbled on it, addressed it to Sam Taney, and called an usher.

Harold had been curiously watching her, and he took the card and read it:

"Sammy, you're simply great! Who's the man you're working with? You're both of you simply great! Come up and see us. I'm dying to see you! Kaleema."

Harold straightened up.

"What rot to send to that fellow," he exclaimed in a whisper. He started to tear the card.

She snatched it and handed it back of him to the usher.

"Beat it, kid," she commanded, and the sedate usher hurried up the aisle.

Harold's face went white. His first impulse was to leave the theater, but his self-consciousness never let him make a spectacle of himself. He sat still.

In a few minutes he pulled himself together and tried to remember his resolution.

Regret for what she had done began to steal over Kaleema. She had done it because she had been so happy to see an old professional friend successful on his first appearance on Broadway; she could realize what it must mean to good old Sam Taney. But ten minutes later the whole thing fell cold. She was afraid to look at Harold. They were strangely quiet all the way home.

When they stepped into their own tiny, dark hall she nervously put her hand on his as he closed the door. It was easier there in the darkness.

"I am so sorry that I did that, dear. I hope that Sam won't come."

He drew his hand away from her and turned on the light.

It was always so.

CHAPTER XIX

GERTRUDE, as was her habit, paid no attention whatever to the message left for her by Harold and transmitted through her mother. On Tuesday morning she went again to see Kaleema. She liked her. Seldom had she liked any one so well.

She was on her way to the settlement, and she stopped to take Kaleema with her. Kaleema hurried into her street clothes and went.

First Gertrude showed her all over the settlement house, Kaleema following her in wonder and admiration. She had never dreamed that such a place would be so practical and plain and wholesome in its simple refinement. In the nursery there were nurses boasting over twenty-five gurgling babies, and in the kindergarten there were two teachers trying their best to make fifty chubby children sing simple songs, play games, or sit and play at little tables. When Gertrude and Kaleema came in here fifty pairs of bashful eyes were turned on them. Gertrude led the way to a window-seat, and from there they watched the proceedings for half an hour. Kaleema was fascinated.

Presently the visitors moved on, and Gertrude

explained that after the public schools were out in the afternoon the older children would come, for the gymnasium, cooking and sewing, and other things. In the evening the grown people had club meetings and classes. The Dramatic Club, made up mostly of intense young Jews and Poles, had a very uncertain director in the person of a college girl who could read Shakespeare beautifully but did n't know enough to come in out of the rain, and did n't Kaleema want to take it? Kaleema's eyes sparkled. Yes, she did.

"Then I'll do my best to get her out," said Gertrude. "It's not being at all unfair to her. She never comes in bad weather and she's always late, anyway. Half the club goes home in disgust and the other half sits and talks anarchy."

"Oh, I should love that," gasped Kaleema, "but I'm afraid Harold will be wild."

"Never mind," said Gertrude. "It won't hurt him. And can you play the piano?"

"Some."

"That's fine. It's perfect slavery, and we always need somebody to do it — for the kindergarten and gymnasium and all sorts of things. We'll count on you for two half-days every week, and when you get that Dramatic Club you may have them as often as you please and can get the use of a room. They are crazy about it, and would come seven nights a week — for you."

The implication made Kaleema smile; and when she went home her head was full of exciting new plans. That afternoon she was too stirred up to stay at home, so, looking extremely pretty and well-dressed, she went downtown and meandered along Broadway. She met three people she knew, one of them being the shabby, dissipated-looking man, and she had a perfectly glorious time standing on the curbstone and talking. It was after six o'clock when she got home, and from the moment that Harold came until she was nearly asleep her tongue ran on like a windmill in a hurricane. There was not a detail that she missed, and some of them she mentioned two or three times. Harold was provoked at Gertrude; but, nevertheless, he wanted to hear the whole thing.

A few days later he was called to the telephone out of the midst of his morning's work.

"Good morning, dear," said his mother.

"Hello, Mother," he answered. He expected that she was going to ask why he had not been home lately. But she was not. He did not know her yet.

"Mrs. Thomas just called me up. She and Anne got in this morning. They are dining with us tonight, and I want you and your wife to come."

There was a moment's intense silence.

"I can't," he answered.

"You must, Harold," she replied very firmly.

"It would be inexcusable rudeness to them. Mrs. Thomas asked about you the first thing. I told her that I would telephone to you right away. Lloyd and Edna have engagements elsewhere, so I will call up Tommy and we will have a nice little family party."

Tommy was a cousin of Anne's and an old chum of Gertrude's. Mrs. Barton spoke slowly, to give Harold time. Just as she knew intuitively, he stood there with his lips twitching, grasping blindly for a decision. He cleared the nervous hoarseness from his throat before he could speak.

"I'm awfully sorry, Mother, but Kaleema is sick with a bad cold."

"Oh, I am so sorry, but I am sure she will be better by night," she answered.

"No, she won't be," he said.

Mrs. Barton bit her lips to hide a little smile. Gertrude was there. She had been helping her mother with the household orders for the day.

"Telephone to her to take good care of herself until night," Mrs. Barton said, "but you must come anyway, Harold. Your wife will understand."

She hung up the receiver before he had a chance to reply.

"Kaleema is ill with a cold," she explained to Gertrude.

Gertrude stood looking straight at her.

"He's getting to be a very agile liar," she observed.

"Gertrude!" exclaimed her mother.

Gertrude answered with an avenging lift of her brows.

"You are a very, very unwise girl," said Mrs. Barton, and left the room.

That afternoon, having arranged his excuse for going at all, Harold left the office as early as possible and hurried to the Eighties, East. He had telephoned to Kaleema that he had something to attend to and would not be home until late.

He found his mother in her room, as usual. He was sure that neither his absence nor what had occurred at his last visit would be commented upon. He was quite right. It was not. His clothes were there, and it all seemed perfectly natural to him when he went into his own room to dress.

When the Thomases arrived he excused his wife by saying she was ill with a dreadful cold. The same cold lasted over to the next night, to his great regret, when he had asked them to dine downtown and go to the theater. Mrs. Thomas and Anne both sent his wife very kind messages. Shortly after, they left for California.

One day soon after, Gertrude telephoned to Kaleema that the college girl of the Dramatic Club had been got rid of. One of the resident directors had

asked her to take something else which would give her a wider scope for her ability; she had consented reluctantly, and they were going to side-track her to the Woman's Club, because that prospered in spite of anything.

"So you go to-night at eight o'clock," concluded Gertrude.

"I'll be there, and on time," said Kaleema. And she was.

There were fifteen in the club. They were very polite to the new director, mostly because they were not yet very Americanized, and partly because they were so glad to be rid of the unreliable last director. When Kaleema looked at them she comprehended that, like herself, they understood work. And she knew from their intense, eager faces, that, like herself, they loved the right kind of work. And in this place alone, out of the whole strange, grasping, rasping country of their adoption, they were able to give the best that was in them.

After the first ten minutes' courtesies had been exchanged they had her sized up. A young Jew, a printer in this country and a university graduate in Russia, helped her to read over and pronounce the list of names, and explained who each one was. She herself started the laughter at the way she got her tongue twisted over the Polish and Jewish words.

"And they're all Americanized, at that," airily

said Miss Rebecca Sorkai, a pretty, fat little school teacher. "They're nothing compared to what we brought over."

She tried to be nice, but she was the only one in the crowd of whom Kaleema was afraid. She had grown up in the New York streets and public schools, and graduated from a New York college, and she was excruciatingly keen, critical and self-possessed. Somehow, she made Kaleema feel very humble. After all, the college girl did have advantages. They stuck out all over this pretty little Jewess. Kaleema was afraid of her life that all of a sudden Miss Sorkai was going to ask her to do some arithmetic, or how to spell something of ten syllables.

The others seemed less analytical. They were more absorbed in their own intense personalities. They themselves were so frankly living with one foot in the finite and the other in the infinite, and suffering so profoundly while torn between the two worlds. Because Kaleema was physically cleaner than themselves, they did not immediately grasp that she was much like them; that her own nature was in the making, in the struggle universal and inescapable. Between them and her there was, at the beginning, just a tacit comprehension that each was striving to do his best and to see the best in a God-made and man-distorted world. Here, where there was no superintendent's watchful eye or workshop clock to grind them through the hours or ruth-

lessly fine them, they could indulge in the luxury of courtesy and toleration. Here they could bring their idealism with them. Here was a place in which to create, and here was the preëminent place to appreciate other men's creations.

"We have been reading Ibsen," explained the young printer, "and we decided to produce 'Pillars of Society,' but we don't seem to make it work out very human."

"It was the last director's fault," dramatically exclaimed a young Pole. "She is a very nice lady, but she pestered us too much about our pronunciation. What if we can't talk English like Sir Henry Irving! Most of us have been talking only Polish or Jewish until two or three years ago. That does n't matter! A great dramatist creates fundamentally human beings. It does n't matter whether they are talking Greek or Yiddish. The essential thing is that they are living, suffering human things. That lady was very nice, but she did not know her business."

At this declaration Kaleema's heart-beats quickened. Here at last was the unnamed something that her soul and brain had been striving for. Here was the explanation of her revolt against the absurd old melodrama and the ranting that had usually earned her living. That was why she had often loved a part when she was studying it and hated it for the way some manager made her play it. Here was a

chance to work out psychology, to get light and shade, and respect values.

"Of course," politely suggested a young woman with a tired, intellectual face, "we shall be glad to do what you like, but that last lady was crazy about Shakespeare —"

"She drowned us in Shakespeare," interrupted the printer, clapping his hands over his eyes.

"For myself," said Kaleema, her voice quite innocent of any tone of apology, "I hate Shakespeare. He's too long-drawn-out and flowery."

Miss Rebecca Sorkai sniffed the air. To her this was blasphemy.

"He's all right to read, I suppose," continued Kaleema, "but when you're trying to work some intense interest and life into a thing, you don't stand for half an hour talking to the moon or describin' a fairy's wings. That may do for a stingy, half-dead old bachelor who imagines he has brains and who pays two dollars for a seat because he is too afraid of fire to climb to a fifty-cent one, but it never gets a thrill out of me."

Miss Rebecca Sorkai's blood all but froze in her veins. She resolved then and there to resign. This was exactly what they might have expected of a show-girl. This was typically America. Oh, for art! — for freedom and justice in Russia!

"Then we'll go on with the 'Pillars of Society'?" inquired the young Pole.

“And can’t we,” suggested Kaleema, a little timidly, “once in a while have a night to read something, something that will help us to imagine things into our other work — and into the world? It will make such a difference, as we go along.”

The printer’s eyes brightened. “Why not?” he said. “What shall we read first?”

Kaleema, seeing the eagerness in their faces, forgot her shyness. Her own eyes deepened in response to theirs.

“I have just finished something that I should like to read again with you, ‘The Sunken Bell.’”

Miss Rebecca Sorkai gave her a quick look. After all, perhaps she would n’t resign. The new director was somewhat baffling.

CHAPTER XX

THE following weeks slipped by like hours. Kaleema grew to love the settlement, and the people there loved her. They feasted their eyes on her because she was pretty, and they opened their hearts to her because she, understanding, could be one of them. She seemed to hold them by some mysterious power, and their suffering wrung her heart. The struggling young actors met four times a week. Under her inspiration everything else in their lives had given way to their passion for this work. Those in charge of the house smiled their indulgence and let the enthusiasm run its course.

One day she met Carney downtown. He was standing on a corner waiting for a car. When he saw her coming he neither ran away from her nor went to meet her, but stood like a husky pillar of indecision.

She went straight to him and held out her hand.

"I suppose you realize that I haven't seen you through any fault of your own," she remarked.

She had on the earrings and the green hat. Her brows looked very straight and fine. He had never seen her when she seemed so lovely.

For answer he smiled down into her eyes.

"And I hope," she went on, shrugging her shoulders, "you have n't been spendin' any money on a big policeman stationed at the gymnasium door to keep me out."

He laughed. But when he spoke his face had hardened into seriousness.

"Your husband would not like to have you do such things as that."

"How do you know he would n't?"

"I should n't like it if you were mine."

She looked at him for a moment, puzzled.

"Are n't you queer?" she said.

"Perhaps I am particular about some things," he replied.

"I believe you are pretty respectable," she said.

"I want a woman to be," he answered.

For a moment she stood looking at the sidewalk.

"You know you have married out of the show business," he said, "and it is best for you to forget a good many of your old associations which your husband might not understand."

"That lets out all my friends," she said wistfully.

"Make new ones," he answered. "Don't be interested in anything but your husband's friends and life. It's the best way to do. Here's my car. I'm glad I met you. Good-by — good-by!"

He shook hands with her and hurried to the car.

She walked on slowly, a little stunned. Her cheeks were burning and she was on the verge of tears. Her feelings were hurt. George Carney preaching! A lot he knew about it!

She turned into a cross-street to get away from the noise of the cars. They made her nervous enough to scream.

She knew now, after the trouble about Sam, though he had come to see her only once, that Harold would be angry if she went to the gymnasium, but she wondered how Carney knew. Anyway, he need not have been so mean about it. Sometimes when she was lonesome and starving for a little gossip, she went into the office of the shabby, dissipated-looking man. He always cheered her up and begged her to come again. He was married — to a shrew of a wife who wandered off over the earth but viciously refused him his freedom.

That was the explanation. It dawned on her after she had walked two blocks. A lonely married man, no matter how straight he means to be, is always deadened more or less to another woman's reputation.

She gave a little understanding nod of her head. That George Carney was splendid.

CHAPTER XXI

MISS REBECCA SORKAI did not resign. Instead, she worked like a slave to learn her part and not to get on Kaleema's nerves at the rehearsals. She even forgot to criticize her when she used bad English, left off her g's, or tipped back in her chair, and sat leaning against the wall, chewing a pencil.

Kaleema discovered that, though most of them went seldom to the theater, it was always to see the best work and the best plays. Her work with them was, to Kaleema herself, the first glimpse of what the stage might mean; in her reading and research for them she found the first definite answer to the vague dissatisfactions and longings which had beset her in the "career" into which she had been so haphazardly tumbled.

Thus the late winter and early spring passed, Kaleema often going to the settlement in company with Gertrude, who continued her stanch friend; and also having the time of her life dressing up and going downtown to sail proudly along the once-hated Broadway, chin in air. She often met old friends, for many of the road shows were already closing and the people coming into town.

She frequently coaxed Harold to go to the little restaurants downtown where she could chatter through the evening. That was what she liked. When he talked it was usually to criticize; at other times he was silent and depressed. She never could get hardened to this mood. It always brought the clutch back to her heart. She tried to change herself, did everything that she could think of to please him, but always she failed. Pretty soon her old naturalness began to fade. She never laughed, only smiled, looking for his approval, and she guarded nearly every word. It was seldom that any slang escaped her, and she had almost forgotten how to swear.

One night downtown they encountered Edna and Haydn. Both out of curiosity and to torment Harold, Edna went over and sat down at their table. Harold did not even pretend to be glad to see them, and Kaleema felt it with the keen sense for reading him that she had developed. Two or three times she caught Haydn's eye and longed to get some fun out of the party, but Harold's sulky face and his manifest boredom were very effective. Arthur Haydn watched her curiously. He wished that, without Harold's overpowering depression, he might have a chance to talk to her. He felt instinctively that she knew her world.

The next day the weather was beautiful, and she could not resist going down Broadway. But that

day, with the clutch at her heart, she saw so many of the old, dreaded things. It was so different over in the avenue and the other places where she and Gertrude often went together, picking up bargains, looking at the lovely things, and having tea at the pretty little shops. In those places it seemed so clean and bright and free and beautiful. But on that day, after the evening when Edna and Haydn had talked to her for a while, the old loneliness seized her, and she straggled back to the old haunt, for old friends. Once there, she saw two of the slowly-walking old women with the bedraggled hats and dresses, the soiled, ragged handkerchiefs squeezed up in their hardened hands, the bloated faces, bedizened by the once-bright ribbons around their necks. And the handsome young women were mostly so bold, and even those who were not bold were questionable, anyway, just because they were there.

Sick with loathing, she went home.

CHAPTER XXII

ONE Thursday late in May, Kaleema's maid (she happened to have one just then) was putting the last touches to her toilet preparatory to the weekly sally into realms unknown, when the door-bell rang.

Kaleema had only a few minutes before returned from market, and she was in the bedroom, putting on a house-dress. She heard voices, and then the maid came to her door, her hat on and her bag in her hand.

"Some one to see you, Mrs. Barton," she said. "And I'm going now."

With which announcement she closed the bedroom door to keep her mistress's half-undressed condition from the visitor, and was gone.

Kaleema could not open the door to speak to her without being seen. For a moment she stood puzzled. It could not be Gertrude, because the maid knew her and would probably have given her name. Kaleema was annoyed. She could not imagine who it might be. Harold's mother had never been there since that first time, yet, some way, she was the first one who came into her mind. Kaleema dressed

carefully but as hurriedly as she could. She did not like the idea of being closed in there, with the unknown visitor alone outside.

Finally she opened the bedroom door. She could see the whole living-room from the threshold where she stood, but no one was there.

For no reason that she could explain, her heart gave a quick throb and she stepped into the room. Still no one was to be seen. She nervously pushed the bedroom door wide open, as if to clear things and gain what space she could. To break the silence, she called the maid's name, but there was no reply. She scarcely expected any, for she was sure the girl had gone. Then she took a few steps and gained the dining-room door.

There stood a figure, its back turned toward her, one hand leaning on the table.

It was a woman of middle height and with a shape as if her corset were soft and old. Her black, gray-streaked hair was short. She had on a small black hat, crooked on her head, a shabby black skirt, and a soiled tan jacket, the sleeves much too long. What could be seen of her fingers showed that the hand on the table was bare. The other hand was held before her. She must have heard the door open and Kaleema's voice, then the approaching steps, but she did not move.

For an instant Kaleema stood still, looking at her. It seemed to her that her heart was choking her.

An unnamed terror seized and held her; then she spoke in desperation.

"Yes?" she said.

No answer.

"Did you want to see me?"

Still no reply.

With a step forward she seized the woman's arm. In her fear her hand closed on it like a vise. She had not expected to find it flesh and blood within her grasp. By that time her fear was named. Then she stood staring into the dark, furtive eyes. They were at the same time sluggish and inquiring. The courage of desperation came to Kaleema.

"Can you speak?" she whispered.

The woman smiled. "Of course," she answered.

"God! — Mother!" she cried, and sank on her knees. "Mother! Mother!" she screamed. She covered her eyes to keep out the vision.

"Hush, Kaleema, don't scream," the woman said, stooping down and shaking her.

"My God, my God!" Kaleema groaned, trembling in every inch of her.

"Hush, Kaleema," the woman repeated. "Didn't you know me? I thought you would know my back — frighten you less than if I faced you. Don't take on so!"

Kaleema looked up and stared at her, then she seized her hands and covered them with kisses. She stared at her again, as if she could not believe her

eyes, and then she began to cry, violently, uncontrollably, burying her head in her arms on the table. The woman coaxed, scolded and shook her, but she kept on crying so hysterically that at last the woman went into the other room to leave her alone.

In a few minutes Kaleema got control of herself and stopped sobbing and trembling. She followed her mother, put her hands on her shoulders and looked at her. The Gipsy returned the look as best she could, with her furtive, stupor-laden eyes, but she soon glanced away. Not a vestige of the fire was still there.

"Mother, look at me! Speak to me! Did you mean to let me think you dead?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Don't cry, now, again! . . . You know why."

The nervous sobbing was choking Kaleema, and her cold hands were trembling; then she controlled herself and stood looking at her mother — old and haggard in her middle-age, worn and very pallid, dull and heavy, not even the remainder of what she had been in her daughter's eyes. It had all disappeared in the last two years. To Kaleema that meant that hope for her was gone. She saw that the crooked hat was held by an elastic under her short hair, and she saw that she held a soiled handkerchief balled up in her hands. Her face was the same, yet changed. To the girl's pitiful, merciless

scrutiny it revealed that the woman had still gone down.

"Talk to me — talk to me, Mother!" she cried. She buried her face on her shoulder, and the Gipsy awkwardly patted her head. She had never known how to pet her, even when she was a child. In many ways she was not quite like a woman.

"Hush, Kaleema," she said, "don't cry."

"Why did you? why did you?" Kaleema whispered.

She raised her head, and saw that her mother was looking curiously about the room.

"I wanted to give you a chance — alone," the Gipsy said.

"Where have you been?" said Kaleema.

Her mother pushed her hat over on her head (it only fell into another horrible angle) and walked away. Kaleema looked after her, the old anxiety in her eyes. Then she took her by the hand and made her sit down.

"Where have you been, Mother?" she repeated. "How could you live without me? What have you done? Why don't you tell me?"

"There's not much to tell," she answered. "The day after the wreck they got names mixed up, and I lay there and heard them give mine to a woman who was killed. I let it go at that."

"And when I went to find you or to talk to people

who had helped you or seen you — where were you? ”

“ I had gone. Only my head was hurt, and they cut off my hair. It’s a shame, too. I feel so queer.” When she looked up there was more concentration in her eyes. “ You are married? ”

The realization of the truth, and the change, was silently passing between them. In the girl’s mind were her infinite pity and compassion and her fear of what was to come.

“ Yes,” she whispered.

“ I heard it,” said her mother. She pushed her hat over the other way. “ And that’s the reason I came. I’m very glad. That’s the best thing to do, Kaleema — ’stead of changing your mind and taking fancies.”

Kaleema’s thoughts were scattering, as if caught by a whirlwind. The uppermost thought in her mind was of Harold, but also she had remembered that her money was nearly gone. Along with her fright and compassion and anxiety, the memory of some of the trifling things that she had bought was going through her brain. There was little reason left in her. She kept repeating to herself the price of the furs and of the bird-cage. It seemed appalling, for such foolishness. She had only thirty dollars left in the savings bank. A feeling of guilt and selfishness tore at her and made her hate every-

thing she had bought. She forgot that it was part of the price she had paid for Harold.

"Just lately I heard about you," her mother was saying; "that you jumped a show and were married."

Kaleema knew by her face that she was lying. She saw her, too, slowly put a hand into one of the jacket pockets.

"Who told you?" asked Kaleema.

"I hunted up the manager, Dillon and what's his name? — Skamon. Had a time finding him, believe me."

"How did you know that I was with them?"

"Read it."

"What paper?"

"I don't remember. . . . Oh, the 'Billboard,' I suppose, or 'Clipper —'"

"Mother!" She began walking the floor. Still the Gipsy was lying.

"And I've had heart trouble again. Doctor says it's marvelous how it keeps going."

"You had no money — what have you been doing?"

"Sewing, dear," she said impressively. "And singing a little."

"Look at me, Mother," Kaleema demanded, stopping before her. "That is n't true."

"In Missouri, dear, in a factory," she insisted with increasing animation. "And I'm going back

soon, darling. I came to find Skamon. He has a new play, and he wished he had you. He 'll forgive you everything."

Kaleema looked at her. "You're not going back," she said. "You can't go away from me."

"I must, dear," very wisely.

"What's in your pocket?" said Kaleema, reaching toward it.

"Don't, I say!" cried her mother, clutching it in terror.

"I'll give it back to you," said Kaleema, taking hold of her wrist. She drew out a box and saw that it was half-full of white powder.

"Medicine — for my heart," said her mother, snatching it from her.

"Medicine!" repeated Kaleema. She turned away and walked across the room, half-dazed in her anxiety. Then suddenly a thought held her. "It's so hard to get now. Did you get that here?"

"No. In North Dakota."

"When?"

"Two weeks ago."

The old woman put the box back in her pocket, and when she looked up she found Kaleema's gaze fastened on her. She knew what she had done.

"Dakota?" the girl repeated under her breath. She came back slowly and stood before the Gipsy. "So that is where you have been. That is where you heard about me." Suddenly she dropped on

her knees and fiercely seized her mother's hands and looked at her. "What have you been doing there? Answer me!" Her voice rang out beyond her control.

"It's not for you to question me," exclaimed the Gipsy.

"Who told you about me?" cried Kaleema, trembling. "I know. It was Adam James. Answer me! answer me! You were with him, and he gave you the money to come to tell me."

The Gipsy laughed. She did not even feel how the girl's desperate hands hurt her.

"God! how he hates me, Kaleema!" Her eyes were gloating.

Kaleema fell back, shuddering, choked by her repulsion. She got to her feet blindly. She crossed the room and sat down, and covered her eyes. For all the years that she had been old enough to work and to understand she had kept the Gipsy with her, and had kept her out of the old life. When she was a child it had gone on, yes; but the moment that she could, she had worked and fought and struggled for them both. She had led her mother as if she were a child. She had scolded her and petted her. She had taken her on the road, and she had settled her safely and left her behind and sent her money, and hurried back when the season's work was done. And then when the Gipsy scented the chance for freedom she broke away. Back she

had gone. Two years she had reveled in the old roving. Two years she had thrown the struggle to the wind. Two years she had lived again as it seemed her Creator meant that she should live. She went back to the ways of her youth, when she drifted freely through the camps and over the plains. Sometimes she vaguely thought of Kaleema. She wondered why it was that her daughter did not want to drift, too. The free way was so much better. So down and down she had gone; and never knew that she was going.

Kaleema opened her eyes and looked at her. The girl dared not speak, for fear of what she might say. Suddenly it dawned on her, for the first time in her life, how essentially childish her mother was. She thought for the first time what a free, unguided thing her childhood must have been, and of the way she had come so far, alone, with that wandering father. Worst of all, she had given her own child so much of that dangerous gipsy wildness! Kaleema's voice was hoarse when she tried to speak.

"But you are not going back to him."

"I am," said her mother, defiantly.

"No," cried Kaleema. "Not while the breath of life is in me. You shall never go. I should n't have supposed . . . you could."

"That does n't come very well from you," her mother said angrily. "Now I can't dance and sing, and I'm not pretty any more, it's not for you to

preach at me because you've got a weddin' ring on your finger, and tell me you're better than I am. I'm just as good as the day you were born."

Kaleema went to her and took her hands firmly. "You don't understand me, dear," she said. "I'm just what you made me. All the good you knew you put in me, and we will still live up to the best there is in us. I'm trying to hold on to all the goodness that God put in you — not to let it get so far away that it will just torment you after you have done the wrong. Your life has been hard, and perhaps God had enough mercy on you to help you to create a kind of goodness that you can hear and feel and see — a kind that will hold you always, always, while you live."

The Gipsy opened the old, soiled handkerchief and began to cry. Kaleema went on.

"Adam James did n't tell you what had happened when I was out there. Before he knew who I was he began talking about you before a lot of people, boasting about you and how he hated you, and I walked over and struck his beastly face so hard that he fell over, and then I boasted how you hated him and had never had a penny from him, and he took you to get even with me. But you're going to stay with me now."

"I don't know what to do," whimpered the Gipsy. "I come to see you, and you treat me like a child. Perhaps I should n t have come."

Kaleema stood by her a moment and patted her shoulder encouragingly, then she walked across the room, her hands over her eyes, trying to think. She came back and took the old rag of a handkerchief from her mother, threw it into the scrapbasket and gave her her own; then she went into the bedroom and partly closed the door. She had to be alone. She stood there motionless in the quiet, pretty room. She was staring at the pale blue wall, but what she saw was Harold's livid face as she had seen it that night in Dakota, when he followed her from the office of the hotel and came into her room. Then she pulled open a dresser drawer and found her bank-book, just to be sure. She threw it back and closed the drawer. When she went to the door to speak to her mother again, her voice was strained and her lips were dry.

"Mother, where is Skamon?"

"Why?"

"Because I'm interested in that new play."

"Dillon's only a desk in an office in the Knickerbocker Building, but his name is in little letters on the door. When Skamon feels like it he turns up there. . . . Why?"

Kaleema did not reply. She went back into the bedroom. She was planning what she would do if the worst came when she talked to Harold that night, and at the same time her eyes were devouring the little room where for nearly five months she and

happiness had lived — strained and anxious happiness but still the nearest approximation to great and complete happiness that she had ever known. She still heard her mother's voice drawling on.

"Good play," she was saying. "Skamon says things have changed — another man has the money in with Dillon. I thought Dillon would be Irish, but he's a Jew. Suppose he had another name when he was born. Other man's Irish name, too. Perhaps he's French. Ever hear of him? Make 'em pay — don't let 'em think you want to go. Make 'em —"

Another sound suddenly caught Kaleema's ear. It was a key at the outside door. She went out and seized her mother's arm and closed her into the bedroom just as Harold came in.

"Anything the matter?" she said, as she faced him.

"Matter?" repeated Harold. "No. I'm going over to Pittsburgh to-night and came home to get my things. I'll have dinner downtown."

He started for the bedroom. Kaleema was standing between him and the door.

"Wait a minute, Harold," she said. He stopped and looked at her. "I want to talk to you about something. Come in here."

She put her hand on his arm and turned him away, and he followed her into the dining-room. He saw that her face was white.

"There's something that I want to talk to you

about, but I'd rather wait until you get home. Will you let me get your things — "

"Cut out this haggling, Kaleema, and tell me what it is," he demanded. "What's the matter?" He looked frightened.

"Why, nothing, Harold."

"Of course there is!" He turned to go back.

She caught his arm. "Wait a minute. Somebody is in there."

He opened his white lips, but did not speak.

"Wait a minute and let me explain."

"Well? Go on!"

"Hush! Not so loud. Something has happened — "

"And somebody is there — "

"Yes."

"Who?"

He bent over her, the pallor of anger in his eyes.

"It's . . . my mother."

His hand dropped, and he recoiled from her.

"She nearly frightened me to death — "

"So you lied about her?"

"I did n't mean to — I thought so — "

"You did n't. You lied."

"I'm telling you the truth, Harold. Until she spoke to me I thought that she was dead."

He gave a short laugh and turned his back on her.

"What shall I do?" she said.

"Do?" he repeated. He sat on the edge of the

table. She could not see his face. "Perhaps she has come for you. If so, you 'd better go with her."

"I may have to. . . . My money is nearly gone." She paused.

"Yes?" he said.

"I'll soon save enough to last her for a little while, and then I can come home."

No answer.

"She requires so little," Kaleema said pleadingly.

"If you go, you will stay," he said. "Remember that."

"Do you mean . . . I can't come home?"

"Yes."

She faced him, horror in her unbelieving eyes.

"I can't . . . come back to you?"

"No."

"Harold!"

It broke from her in a cry. She stood there, her hands out, not daring to touch him. "What shall I do with her?"

No answer.

"Harold!"

Silence.

"Harold!"

Silence still; horribly cruel, caddish silence.

"Don't say that to me," she cried. "You can't. You can't. You must n't. Does n't the happiness of this beginning count at all? I am just the same — I will be just the same when I come home. By

that time you will forgive me, for you will want me back . . . as I shall want to come. Without you life would be torture now. If you kiss me now, you will forgive me before I go. Because I love you! And when I come back I will beg of you and beg of you and beg of you, and you can't send me away. And these five months will beg for me, all the time that I am gone, and when I come back you will forgive me, for you can't send me away! Har-old, won't you speak to me? Won't you even look at me?"

He slowly rose from the table, his back to her.

"Speak to me. For God's sake, talk to me. Tell me why. I don't want to go. I must go. I could n't live, I could n't breathe, I could n't see, if I let her go alone. Can't you understand? There are things bigger than we are in this world. Can't you understand?"

He went to the outside door. She held out her hands to him in silent, speechless appeal.

"I'll not be back until the day after to-morrow," he said.

He closed the door and dashed downstairs. Once on the sidewalk, he started for his mother's home almost on a run.

He knew that he was free.

And he was hoping that Kaleema would not make any trouble at the office.

CHAPTER XXIII

KALEEMA stood staring at the door that had closed behind him. Then she covered her face, pressing her hands until the flesh was white. Then suddenly she tore her hands from her face and bared it to the glare of light from the window. This was what she should have expected — from the beginning. . . . She knew it now. She walked around the table, her hands clasped over her heart; and then she went into the deserted kitchen where she could close the door. She stood there motionless for some time. She felt as if she were looking into the eyes of God; and that she was trying to read there why she had been made the keeper of a thing called her soul. When she raised her head her lips twisted in a smile.

The next morning Gertrude Barton received this note :

Dear Gertrude: Please come and get the cage and the little bird. It is yours.

I shall never see you or Harold again. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for your friendship, and for helping me to hope to help just one.

KALEEMA.

PART III



CHAPTER XXIV

THE first streak of the next dawn returned consciousness to Kaleema's brain. Before she was aware of it, some uncontrolled instinct had made her put out her hand. The realization came with a shock that was stupefying. For a moment she lay there unable to open her eyes, struggling to remember the reason for a terrible anxiety which oppressed her.

Suddenly her eyes opened and she sprang up on the bed and looked across the strange, grayish room. Then a stifled exclamation of relief just escaped her lips, and she pressed her trembling hands to her head to quiet the unnecessary fright.

Her mother was safely there, fast asleep, at full length on a cot. Her face still had its pallor, but it was full and shiny from the warmth of the night and her heavy slumber. Her short black-and-gray hair was matted against her cheek where it had pressed the pillow. The covers were dragging on the floor and her feet were bare.

Kaleema looked wearily around the strange room. She remembered everything by that time, with the dull, sickening memory that intrudes and convinces

that it is no dream. Her two trunks were there, and her suitcase and umbrella; and her mother's clothes and her own were lying scattered on the chairs.

After all, the room was not wholly strange. She was back in West Thirty-eighth Street, in the very house where she first met Harold — where the hand-organ monkey ran after her and made her scream. She had come back here because it was cheap and clean and respectable, and she knew the nice little woman who kept the house. She had seen this room often enough, and been in it; but she had never taken it before because it was larger and more expensive than she could afford. She had had to take it last night because there were two of them; and, anyway, it was cheaper now. The whole house was cheapened by a big office and loft building that was in course of erection next door, which filled the place with dust and dirt and the shriek and groan of machinery.

She fell back on the bed and buried her face in her arms. Yesterday seemed old, old and far away. Last night she had been half-dead with exhaustion when she tumbled her mother and the suitcases and the umbrella and herself into the room about nine o'clock, and then had to wait for the trunks an hour and a half. This morning her brain felt stunned and bruised and bleeding with all the deluge of thinking and planning; and, hardest of all, with struggling to keep some things out of it.

She looked at her watch and allowed for the ten minutes fast that she still kept it, as she used to for reaching trains; it would be hours before she could get into offices or find anybody. Harold was on the train, perhaps not asleep. If not, he must be thinking . . . thinking. . . . She closed her eyes and covered her lips tight with her hands to keep back the reproach and the twitch of pain. She had promised herself that yesterday, while she was hurrying to get things packed and to leave. There should be no blame, even if the haunting ache should never go. She had been a fool and a child ever to create an idol. She told herself that over and over again. Her world did not admit of any illusions; it was merciless reality. If only she had acknowledged that. But she had dreamed; and it had left her with her lips set and her eyes closed in the cruel struggle to keep out the regret and the ache and the memory. . . . This thinking was what she must not do. She looked at her watch again. Five minutes had gone by. She rose and quietly emptied the suitcase and put the things on the dresser in some kind of order. That took her to the mirror, and when she saw herself she started back. A fine-looking object she was to go out on Broadway hunting for work! She got a towel and rubbed her face to put some color into it.

It seemed hours before there was any sound in the huge skeleton that oppressed the windows, but

finally she heard the shoveling of coal and the bang of iron, and men's voices, and she knew that the first workmen had come to start the machinery. After a while the near and the distant whistles blew, and the piercing scream of the one next door roused her mother.

"You up and dressed already?"

"Yes, dear, but it's early. Plenty of time for a nap."

Her mother turned over and went to sleep again.

At ten o'clock Kaleema was sitting in the waiting-room of the office of the shabby, dissipated-looking man. She had been there nearly half an hour, and he had not come. That was the worst of these offices — waiting interminably for some man that seemed likely never to come. Probably he was in a barroom, talking about nothing important under the sun. Her mother was with her, sitting in a corner, because Kaleema was afraid she would disappear if she lost sight of her. The sleepy-eyed office boy was sharpening pencils and putting them in a fantastic row. A man wearing a wig and devoid of eyebrows had come in after she had and sat limply fanning himself with his hat and looking at the floor. Kaleema was very pretty, but she had on too much rouge. That was partly because she was going back into the fight where the way she could stand out against the scenery and the strength of her voice were among the first considerations; and also because

the rouge had a tremendous psychological influence upon her. She rubbed it on for the same reason that a man swallows a drink of whisky. Instantly she was ready to meet the world with new courage.

After a while the door opened brusksly and the shabby, dissipated-looking man came in.

"Hul-lo!" he said in surprise, when he saw Kaleema. He glanced at the Gipsy and nodded at the man, then Kaleema followed him into his private room.

She was n't going to let the man with the wig get ahead of her. She had been there first. The old, loathsome fight had begun. She hated herself, the office, the boy, the little telephone switch-board, the man with the wig — almost the shabby, dissipated-looking man. This one turned, and his big black eyes stared at her.

"I'm going back to work, Billy," she said quite calmly.

He swallowed his surprise, unlocked his roll-top desk and sat down. She was trying to smile, but that could not deceive him. He turned in his chair and looked at her.

"Sit down," he said.

She had forgotten to. She hooked up a chair with her foot and sat down, leaned her elbow on a ledge of the desk and began biting her nails. She knew that she was not deceiving those big black eyes, and it made her nervous.

"Not — trouble, girl?" he said.

She gave a short, dry laugh. "Of course," she answered. She changed the subject quickly. "I thought possibly you might be in on a summer stock, or know about one, so I have come right to you. I need something right away. That's my mother out there."

"Good God! your mother?"

"She was in that wreck, but she was n't killed. They got names mixed, and she deceived me purposely. She came to me yesterday. Do you know of anything, Billy?"

He started to close the door.

"Don't close the door; I want to keep my eye on her."

"I want to talk to you."

"But I don't want to talk to you. I'd be crying in half a minute." She pulled off the other glove and fussed at her hair. He sat down again and stared at the carpet.

"I have closed everything until August," he said. "And then it's musical, you know."

"Yes, I know it," she said. She was still smiling.

"I have n't heard of anything —"

"Of course it's only one chance in a thousand that you would —"

"But I may. . . . What's the matter?"

She got up nervously and pushed the chair out of the way.

"Ended, Billy, that 's all. Better, anyway, than hanging fire."

"Don't go. Sit down."

"I 'm going over to Dillon now. Gee! but I hate to do that." She laughed. "Seems to me that I never yet swore not to do anything that God Almighty did n't make me do it."

"I know," he said. That was the best of him. Back of those bold eyes was a comprehension of many things. "But Carney is the best of that crowd."

"Sure, but I don't want to bother him."

"That 's his business."

"I know."

That was ended.

"How long were you married?"

"Nearly five months. Long time!"

"Deucedly long, sometimes." He ought to know. Somewhere in the world he had a wife who would not give him back his freedom. But even she had not taken out of his soul the longing for a reasonable woman. "Were you ever happy?" he said.

She turned away and started for the door. "Yes."

"Is it too late to try again?"

She looked back at him. She was not smiling now. Instead, the old cynicism, intensified, was there.

"Billy, it was too late for that two days after I

was married. Only I was a fool and did n't know it then." She shrugged her shoulders.

"The pity is we can't stay fools," he said.

"The pity is," she answered, "that women are n't born knowing that decency is the world's best joke."

"Don't," he said. "Don't talk to-day."

"You're right," she admitted.

"I'll look around this morning, and if you don't hear of anything will you come back?"

"Yes," she lied. She knew she would not.

"Will you, really?" He was thinking that she had been in the business all her life, and his own broken-down self was the only one she could turn to when she was in trouble.

"Yes. Good-by."

When she got over to Dillon's office it was 10:30, and he was there.

"Hello, Mr. Dillon. Sit down, Mother."

"Why, hello, Miss West!" he exclaimed. He had just finished his mail, and he picked up a big black cigar. "This is an unexpected pleasure. Seems to me you're out pretty early for a loidy." He had already heard from Skamon about her mother.

Kaleema laughed. "Yes, a heap of a loidy!" She sat down by his desk. "Say, Mr. Dillon, I'm goin' back to work."

He raised his sleek eyebrows, but he did not even flutter the sleek expression of his brown eyes.

Henry Dillon, with the silky black hair and the murky complexion, had acquired perfect self-possession.

Kaleema continued. "Are you sending out anything now?"

"Company opens to-night," he answered.

It seemed to Kaleema that, with a sickening thud, her heart fell and stopped beating. Her lips went dry.

"What woman's playing the lead?"

"Miss — Miss — Miss —" he muttered, although he knew perfectly well, and fumbled in his desk and pulled out a program, "Rawlins."

He handed the program to Kaleema. She glanced over it. Never before had she heard of Eva Rawlins.

She looked sharply at Dillon. "Particular friend of anybody's?" she asked.

Dillon calmly returned her gaze. "No."

"George Carney's?" she probed. (Such things are always possible.)

"Not that I am aware of."

"Are you perfectly satisfied with her?"

"No."

"May I have it?"

That was what he was waiting for.

"You jumped one of our shows, Miss West," observed Mr. Dillon.

That was what she was waiting for.

“ And how much did you owe me when I did it? ” she inquired. “ And did you have a leadin’ man so that if I had stayed, the company ’d have been workin’? ”

To her surprise, he did not remind her of the money that Carney had taken to her at the station.

As a reason for moving her eyes from his sleek face she looked back at the program.

“ Gee! ” she said, smiling, “ Charley and dear old John Crichton! Sarah, of course, and Skamon. ‘ Camille ’ is it? ”

“ No, stock, ” he answered pompously.

That sounded well, better than rep, anyway. She let it go, but she wanted to ask if it were three-night stands and if they were traveling on railroads. While she was looking at the program he was looking at her. He made it part of his pompous pose to hate all actors, and he had always especially hated Kaleema’s intelligence. Now he hated her new beauty and her good clothes and a certain new and baffling quality of personality. He didn’t hate actors half so much when they were shabby; then he felt them more or less in his power.

“ This program is ‘ Camille, ’ ” Kaleema continued. “ What else? ”

He was ready enough to boast about that.

“ We are using that now because we had the old stuff together and some of the people are up in the parts. The next town is booked for a week, and

the three last plays are in rehearsal. And we are experimenting with 'The Waiting'—"

Her eyes flew wide open. "'The Waiting?'" she repeated.

He nodded calmly, heroically repressing his gratification.

"Good Lord, that was on Broadway!" she exclaimed. He calmly nodded again. Certainly it was on Broadway. What so surprising about his having something that was on Broadway? She wanted to ask him if he had stolen it; then she suddenly remembered something — her mother's saying that an Irishman now had the money in the company. "Yours or Carney's?" she blurted.

This made him angry. More exhibition of her smartness.

"Carney has a part interest in it," he replied. He lied. Carney owned the entire show. "A good many ex-pugilists are getting into the show business these days," he observed.

"Yes, and gettin' out of it, too," she said. He smiled. "With their pockets lined," she added. His smile disappeared. She did n't care; she could stand anything but to hear him slur George Carney. "'The Waiting' was a failure, the papers said," she continued.

"It won't be — on the road," he answered.

"And I suppose they were so mad they were givin' it away — scenery, paper, advertisin', damn-fool

author, and the whole thing," she continued, guessing. He calmly nodded again. "An' you have the New York run back of you, an' — well, say, what do you know about that!" She was lost in admiration.

This use of her intelligence pleased him in spite of himself. Then he suddenly remembered how Carney had walked the floor when he had first got possession of the play, wildly rumpling his hair and wishing to all that was good on earth or in heaven that Kaleema West was working. A slow light came into Dillon's sleek brown eyes. Yes, he must admit, she did have some imagination. He began fingering papers on his desk, chiefly for an excuse to keep his eyes on them.

"We hurried the show out," he continued, "to get it working. We have our eye on a summer park —"

"With a traction company back of it?" she interrupted.

Lord! she was provoking. Was there any one thing about the business that she did not know or imagine?

"Yes," he assented gravely. "It's too early to put in stock, but it's a good thing to have the company together. And we're experimenting with the new play, of course under another name for the try-out, and" — magnanimously — "it keeps the people working."

This brought them back to the beginning. He meant that it should. She faced the crisis. She knew that he hated her and that he realized that, from her independence, she had been brought back to his mercy. She gave a nervous twist to her gloves and looked at him.

"Mr. Dillon, will you give me that work?"

The new play was to go on to-morrow night. He had already decided that Kaleema West was going to be in it. Besides, if he refused her, she would probably go to Carney and get it anyway.

"The other woman is already working," he said pompously.

Kaleema moistened her lips and put her hand on the desk. "She can't need the work as I do," she said. "It's the first time I ever took work from another woman, but I need it desperately — now."

From the beginning of rehearsals he had wanted to get rid of Eva Rawlins. Her work was bad and worse than that.

"She's working very cheap," he announced, defiantly looking at her. "Twenty dollars." Another lie. They were paying her thirty.

"My God!" gasped Kaleema.

Dillon shrugged his shoulders and pushed back the papers.

"Better than nothing," he went on; "and this has been a very bad season, and they can live cheap in these little towns."

Kaleema got up, she was so tortured with indecision. This was the worst that had ever been offered her.

"Oh, that bad season stuff is part of the business," she exclaimed, "only it's too much when managers start tellin' us how little it takes to live and buy wardrobe."

He thought she was refusing. "We'll make it twenty-two-fifty, Miss West, because we know you, but that's the best we can do." He got up, as if to bow her out.

Her voice was hard and dry. "Very well, I'll take it," she said.

"You'll have to work to-night, in 'Camille,'" he said; "and the new play goes on to-morrow, and 'Oliver Twist' the third night."

"'Camille' has gone completely out of my head. I've had so much confusion —"

"Actors have to expect emergencies," he said pompously. He fished in the desk until he found a copy of the part in the new play. He handed it to her.

She turned it over. Her hands were trembling. In the flood of her trouble everything of a half-year ago had left her mind. "Seventy-five sides here," she said. He nodded. "And 'Camille' is so long —"

"Skamon will give you 'Oliver,'" he interrupted.

"And this is the only way?"

"The only way."

He would get rid of that rag-bag of a Rawlins at any risk. Besides, he knew Kaleema. Once her head against the wind, she always won.

For a moment she stood biting her white lips; then she folded the part and cleared her throat. "Have you a copy of 'Camille'?"

He found one and gave it to her.

She was thinking that the trunks were packed. "When does the train leave? And how long is the run?"

"Three hours. They're up-state. Can you get off by one o'clock? It's eleven now."

"Yes."

"Will you sign the contract now?"

"Yes." Her lips were set. She was signing herself into at least two weeks of torture, until she should know her parts.

She read and signed both copies, and he signed one and gave it to her. He advanced the money for her railroad ticket and gave her a slip of paper with the railroad and name of the town. She took it from him and picked up the parts. Then she went over and roused her mother from a stupor, led her out into the hall and closed the door. Out there she put her hand over her eyes. She was dizzy. The hall and the elevators and the whole world were black and swimming. When she and her mother got into the elevator she leaned heavily

against the side. She looked so ghastly under the rouge that a man stared at her. When she got out of the elevator she did not even see the starter, who smiled because he had been there a long time and recognized her.

When the door closed Dillon called a messenger, and while he was waiting for him wrote this telegram to Skamon: "Fire Rawlins. West back for twenty-two-fifty. Works to-night."

When presently the door opened and the messenger bobbed in, a man immediately followed him. It was Carney.

Dillon bounded out of his chair. "Some luck! You get your wish," he said, and he handed Carney the telegram.

Carney read it, then he raised his head and stared at Dillon, his face drawn with surprise.

"She's been here?"

"Yes," smiled Dillon. "I told her Rawlins is working for twenty."

Carney reread the telegram. It had n't all got through his head the first time. Then when he looked at Dillon his eyes were pale with anger. He tore up the telegram before he trusted himself to speak. He meant never to have a quarrel with Dillon for fear that he should kill him.

"That was a rotten trick," he said, with an oath.

Dillon's tight lips parted for a retort and accusa-

tion, but for once Carney's wits saved his big fist a blow.

"How long do you suppose she would stay — for that — when she got a chance to go? And if anybody can pull us through, she can."

Dillon shut his mouth and turned away. Then he slammed out of the office and banged the door. Carney sat down at the desk to write Skamon another telegram. His glance fell on the contract with her name, and he tore it up and threw it away. Then he wrote two messages. The one to Skamon read: "Kaleema West back. Works to-night. Thirty dollars. Do your best about Miss Rawlins. George Carney."

The second one, to Kaleema West in care of Skamon, read: "This engagement pays you thirty dollars a week. George Carney."

Could he have seen her in the elevator she would not have worked that night.

When the messenger had gone Carney stood in the middle of the floor and stared at the wall. Kaleema back. Something must have happened.

He had intended, as a matter of course, to go up to-morrow for the first performance of "The Waiting." Now he would not go.

CHAPTER XXV

ABOUT 2:30 o'clock that afternoon (it was Thursday) Charley Forbes, his hat on the back of his head and his feet on the verandah railing, the pink ring still adorning his saffron finger, was the sole human decoration of the front of a certain hotel, when a boy rode up on a bicycle and pulled two telegrams out of his pocket. He guessed that the stranger on the porch belonged to the show. At any rate, he looked it.

"Harry Skamon here?" inquired the boy.

"I'll take them," said Charley, letting his chair down on its front legs and closing the part he was studying. The poor fellow's thick head was nearly bursting with study. He had done nothing for days and nights but exist, with his fagged brain going over and over those infernal lines.

He took the telegrams, signed for them, and the boy rode off.

"Harry!" he called at the office door. He thought Skamon was nearby. "Telegrams."

"I'll take them to him," said Sarah. "Don't shout so! This is a decent hotel. Where are they from?"

“How do I know?” snapped Charley. “You’ll have to ask the sportin’ editor of the ‘War Cry,’ as Kaleema used to say.”

Kaleema! Scarcely a day went by that some of them did not affectionately speak her name.

Sarah looked at the telegrams; and then she uttered an exclamation. Charley stared. “Look at this!” she commanded, and showed him the one addressed to Kaleema West, care of Skamon. Charley’s jaw dropped. Then Sarah lost all professional decency and tore open the manager’s telegram.

What she discovered she was too professional to disclose to Charley, but cruelly left him standing with his mouth and the office door wide open, while she turned, stepped on Trilby, slapped her for yelping in that decent hotel, and then rushed to find Harry.

Fifteen minutes later Harry was interviewing Miss Eva Rawlins. He told her that he was worried about her in those parts and how rotten she had been that morning at the rehearsal.

The train was only ten minutes late. Sarah and Charley were down at the station. There would be no rehearsal that afternoon — unless Kaleema wanted it, on account of the new people.

When Kaleema stepped off the train she threw her arms around Sarah, and for a moment she could not speak; then she shook hands with Charley and introduced her mother. Sarah and Charley were

surprised, but both of them exhibited most praiseworthy manners, and Charley took the suitcase, quite in defiance of all strictly professional proceedings, and a box that Kaleema was carrying. The box contained knickerbockers for *Oliver* and a marked-down evening dress that she was forced to buy at a cheap store on their way to the train, because she had so little wardrobe left. She had just sixty-five cents in the whole world when she stepped off that train and met Sarah Skamon.

Charley walked ahead with Mrs. West and tried to talk to her. Sarah walked along with Kaleema, but she did not speak. There was too much of understanding between them. Besides, a strange look in the girl's eyes had warned her. Never before had Sarah Skamon seen such an expression. It was not only trouble. It was a sort of still, half-unbelieving horror.

Suddenly she remembered the telegram. "I almost forgot this, Kaleema," she said, and handed it to her.

Kaleema took it before she realized what it was; then it nearly fell from her nerveless fingers.

"Harold! Harold! Harold!" throbbed through her mind and seemed to keep her heart from beating. She walked along, holding it as if it were burning her hands. After they had gone half a block she folded it and put it in her purse. She had decided not to open it.

But it had driven the last three terrible hours' hard work out of her brain. There on the train she had been struggling with *Camille's* long speeches. She could concentrate on nothing. It was not only the thought of that outrageous twenty-two dollars, and of Harold, and the whole thing, but something else was gripping her heart — something new and poignant and terrifying. The lines and the cues stared at her from the paper like perfect strangers. In desperation she put it away and read over the part of "The Waiting." It was splendid. Carney would succeed. Then came the telegram to drive out all memory.

After she had registered at the hotel, Sarah spoke to her.

"Want a rehearsal, Kaleema?"

"No," she answered.

She beckoned to her mother, and they followed the bell-boy upstairs. The Gipsy lagged behind in the hall and took some of the white powder. In a few minutes, after she had seen Skamon, Kaleema hunted up the leading man and went over their scenes with him. He was rather nervous. He did n't know the lines very well and he had never before played the part. He was a serious-minded, good-looking fellow. He and Kaleema had sometimes seen each other in the offices. He had had to take whatever came first this summer because his wife was not well and was not working.

The Gipsy slept all the rest of the afternoon, and Kaleema tried to study, always with that telegram burning into her brain, driving out the words that her lips were unmeaningly repeating. She kept tracing out how Harold had found her. Probably he had telephoned from Pittsburgh to somebody — perhaps to Gertrude — after that night on the train, when he had had time to see that he had lost her. He knew where to find Billy (the shabby, dissipated-looking man), and probably he had sent somebody — maybe Gertrude — to him, and he had said to go to Dillon. That was easy enough. That was the way the telegram had reached her. But he did n't know that everything was ended.

Somewhere a clock in the town struck six. She covered her eyes and tried to study. It was impossible. Neither she nor her mother wanted anything to eat, so she took the Gipsy and went over to the theater early. Sitting there in the hotel looking at a page was useless. There was almost no place to put her mother in the dressing-room; nevertheless she took her. She could not endure the added anxiety of leaving her at the hotel, perhaps to run away.

Kaleema never beheld Eva Rawlins. But all that afternoon and evening she was haunted by the thought of what she had done to her. It followed her for years after. She never knew when Skamon fixed it up with Eva, when their trunks changed

places in the dressing-room, or when she took her departure. But she knew that for a week Eva Rawlins had been slaving over study and at rehearsing. That was bad enough, but later on a woman in the company told her that she had bought a dress on the strength of Dillon's promises, and that Skamon had given her nothing but a ticket back to New York. It made Kaleema feel faint to think of it. She herself had been through the same thing. That made it worse.

Kaleema had to wear her own new dress that night, so the first thing she did at the theater was to try it on. Then she got out her make-up and the lights and her other clothes; the book was spread open on the shelf and her lips moved ceaselessly over the long speeches. She kept reminding herself that she was working with new people and must not throw them out. It was Carney's show; and if to-night took the very life out of her, she would not kill it. That was easy enough to say, but when she kept thinking — thinking. . . .

"Half-hour!" called John Crichton.

A breath of exclamation escaped her. She had just started making up. She knew that Carney was n't worried because he trusted her. Why should n't he? She had played this part half a season. She ought to know it backwards. Her brain felt numb — except for thinking, thinking of "The Waiting" and the telegram and Eva Rawlins.

“Fifteen minutes!”

It was very still in the dressing-rooms. All the new people were nervous, and the old ones were nervous on account of them. But Kaleema would be all right, anyway; she was always all right. And she was of the most importance.

“Overture and first act!”

She had to hold to a chair to keep herself from going to Skamon and telling him that she could n't work. She began thinking of excuses to give him. Then she picked up the book, and before she knew it she was pacing the back of the stage, holding her skirts out of the dust, shivering and her teeth chattering. She was still staring at the words without seeing. The night was chilly, but all the doors and windows back there were open, and the damp air was blowing on her. It seemed to strike to her very heart. Several of the company were there, glancing at her, but she did not see them. She was so distracted that even the stage men were looking at her. Suddenly she threw the book down on the floor in a corner. The leaves fell together. It was the last of the overture, and it found her in terror. Her lips were uncontrollable and her mind felt empty. Her knees were shaking under her. Something must happen — something must break. The next instant, not seeing, thinking or hearing, she ran back to her dressing-room. She searched for the purse, throwing things everywhere. Nothing could be worse

than this. Her shaking hands tore the telegram open.

"This engagement pays you thirty dollars a week. George Carney."

"H'm," she breathed. She was leaning heavily against the shelf. "Oh!"

She heard voices on the stage. The curtain was up. The dusting had commenced and *Nanine* and *Varville* were talking.

"Oh!" she said again, and then she laughed so that it roused the Gipsy. She flung her hands into the air and closed her eyes. Then she rushed out and closed the door.

That night there was a good house, the stage was well set, and the part of *Camille* was beautifully, splendidly, passionately played.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER the show it was very quiet among the dressing-rooms. Eleven o'clock had come.

Kaleema and her mother were the last to leave the theater, because Kaleema waited to take out her clothes for to-morrow night. Her brain was relieved and she felt rested. But still the strange, twisted, burning look was in her face.

She and her mother went to a restaurant and got something to eat before they walked back to the hotel. Once in their room, the Gipsy pulled off her clothes and tumbled into bed. Kaleema got out the new part and studied until three o'clock. She was awake again at six, and she lay there for an hour trying to be quiet, but her hands were clenched and her eyes were open. She did not want to look at the part again before the rehearsal. At seven she dressed, and then she roused her mother. As she went to her she thought that she looked very ghastly. She wondered what would become of her when the present supply of powder was gone. How she pitied her!

At ten they were at the theater for rehearsal.

Kaleema knew without being told how hard they

had worked over the new play. It was George Carney's first venture, and here she was being thrown into it in one day. It was n't fair to him. She ought to have gone to him about it. Eva Rawlins should have been kept for this night at least. This town did not much matter, but if it failed here it might disgust and discourage him. Of course it was not going on now under its rightful name. Neither was the New York run to be mentioned. Carney certainly was experimenting. He had doubled on some of the parts to cut down expense, and he had cut out one scene that he concluded had dragged the whole thing on Broadway.

The play had managed to hang on for two months in New York, but it had nearly brought the author and the star, a woman, to financial ruin. The manager got out at the end of the first week, but they stuck. They had faith in it, for the thing had a big theme. The work in it had given the actress keen satisfaction and had made the reputation of more than one man and woman. After the two months had gone by and the box-office receipts suddenly showed a renewed ability for dwindling, the star and the author cursed all human intelligence and were ready to set fire to the scenery. In that state of mind the author went into a café one night to drown his troubles; but when he had reached only the stage that made him ready to weep on almost anybody's shoulder, he found himself talking to a man whose

name turned out to be Carney. By closing time they had come to some sort of agreement. When Carney left him he did not know whether or not the distraught dramatist was sober enough to remember it the next morning, but he did know that he himself had pledged a good part of his whole life's savings. That, however, was not a great deal, money having a way of slipping from George Carney's fingers. He had saved it only when it came in bunches, so that it seemed worth saving; and he smiled, on his way home, as he recalled some of the times. He was also negotiating just then about the summer stock company. That would take more of the money. If he won out, all right; if he lost the whole thing, he would get out of the business. It was nothing but gambling, anyway. He had determined never again to have any connection with Dillon or Skamon. Then, as he walked home that night, he had realized that if he were going into this road company, Dillon was the only available man he knew who could be worth something to him. Skamon should be kept out of the business end.

The next morning the dramatist did remember. He was not likely to forget anything so materially to his advantage. What any sane man wanted of "The Waiting" was more than he could imagine, but he had a very special and urgent need for Carney's money. Carney, however, knew what he wanted of the play. It was a good, strong type

of high-class melodrama, and, intelligently acted, could be made a splendid sporting chance as a play. Besides, it had Broadway back of it and it was cheap. And, more than all, it was thrown at his head by fate at a moment when he was drifting. Inside of two weeks the deal was made. The price of the play included all the paper on hand and the scenery. They almost gave it to him for carting it out of their sight. Next came the contract with Dillon, who admitted that Carney had had a streak of good luck and had shown good judgment, and that he was not averse to taking a small chance on the outcome.

The Broadway company had had four weeks of rehearsals on "The Waiting." In one week Skamon whipped into some sort of shape "The Waiting," "Oliver Twist," and "Camille." Years ago, when Fourteenth Street was the center of things theatrical, that same Harry Skamon, so shabby now, was of importance. If his common-sense had been equal to his ability. . . . Anyway, his present-day speed was no more ridiculous than George Carney's tampering with the manuscript. But the noted dramatist and the noted actress had made a mess of it, had n't they?

Skamon hurried the rehearsal, and by twelve o'clock they left the theater:

Kaleema settled her mother in the hotel parlor for a while, and then she went to her room and closed

the door to be alone. She looked at the part, and then she held her head tight with her hands. She had studied like this before, she kept reminding herself. Why not now? She opened the part and began to study. Last night's work did n't seem to have done much good. She felt dull, as if her whole body were going to sleep and her eyes were closing. It came into her mind that she would gladly give half her life if they could get Eva Rawlins back. She could save her this torture. She sprang to her feet and started for the door, scarcely knowing what crazy notion was in her mind. Then she laughed noiselessly and sat down again, and again began to study. It had to be done. Presently she forgot Harold and other things, and Eva Rawlins. . . . The door slowly opened.

"It's two o'clock," said her mother.

"Mercy! dear, it seems only a minute, and we're both of us hungry."

She threw the part on the bed, and they went downstairs. They met Sarah, who told them that Harry had had a telegram from Carney that he was detained and was not coming.

In half an hour Kaleema was studying again. Pound, pound, pound. Two or three times she got up and walked over to the window. Out there was the same old story. The actors were on the hotel veranda, and girls of all conditions and classes were parading around to look at them. Up at the corner

she saw Charley Forbes walking off with a girl in a pretty dress, with her hair in a braid hanging down her back. Probably she had a "strict" father and mother somewhere, with their heads stuck in the sand like wise old ostriches. But this was not study. She went at it again. Pound, pound, pound. Was it never coming!

At five o'clock she hunted up Charley. She had an important scene with him and she dreaded it. That rich man's son was nearer anything on earth than an actor. He was always going up in the air and standing stock-still and staring, like a wooden image. When she found him he started in to give her some advice, but she promptly told him very nearly what she thought of him.

When 7:30 stared her in the face it seemed much too soon, but she pulled herself together, took her mother, and again went over to the theater. She made up and dressed hurriedly.

"Half-hour!" called old John Crichton.

She sat down to study. Charley came in for soap. She told him he could n't have it; then she told him to take it and keep away from her for the rest of the evening. Then the "heavy woman" in the next dressing-room began talking. The rest of them knew their lines, or were supposed to. Charley had gone in there in his quest for conversation, and she was telling him that she never, never studied after she got to the theater. Kaleema knew she lied —

last night she had caught her doing it. Charley agreed with her; he himself could fake out of anything.

That was too much for Kaleema. She jumped up in desperation.

"Fifteen minutes!" called old John Crichton.

Kaleema suddenly discovered that the Gipsy was standing beside her.

"My heart feels so bad to-night," she said.

"See here, Mother," cautioned the girl, "don't you touch another bit of that powder."

Then she stood at the shelf and her dry lips kept repeating the words mechanically. From the first act her nervous fingers kept turning over to the climax in the third act. Then back to the first act again. If she lived through the first act it was time enough then to worry about the third. She lost all patience with herself. She had never felt like this before. She had worked as hard as this for a week at a time, but never had had hysterics until Saturday night after the show, when there was plenty of time for them.

"Overture and first act!" called old John Crichton.

"There!" exclaimed her mother. She was beginning to get very much excited.

"You stay right in here, Mother," said Kaleema. "Don't once come near the wings. To-night there's too much confusion."

Her voice was steady, but nervousness had set her teeth to chattering. She picked up the part and deliberately walked to her first entrance. Two of the stage men were standing there.

"Whenever you see this part lying around to-night please be very careful not to disturb it," she said.

They nodded.

"Places. Foots up! House out!" said old John Crichton.

The curtain went up. Still she was studying. Her first entrance had three scenes, and she went off on the other side. That meant that she had to run around here to get the part again, and go back. . . . She put the part down in a corner. It was open at the next entrance . . . if nobody kicked it and lost the place. . . . That was her cue!

The first scene did not go badly as to lines. So far as she was concerned there was little life in it. The next scene was the important one with Charley. How she dreaded it! She could see him standing in the entrance. He was frightened so nearly to death that he missed his cue. Luckily Sarah was standing there, and she pushed him. Finally he was out on the stage, his eyes glassy. He skipped three important speeches and jumped into the scene. Sarah, there in the wings, stifled a groan. Skamon, listening over on the other side, cursed him under his breath. Kaleema moistened her dry lips and

caught up with him. She had a long speech and she did not miss a word of it. She did more. She put in something important that should have come in one of the speeches that he left out.

"God! she's a brick!" Sarah whispered to one of the stage hands. He shrugged his shoulders.

The scene went miserably. Everything had gone out of Charley's head. Kaleema struggled to save him. She could n't. The next minute she was up in the air herself. All she wanted was to get rid of him. Over in the wings Skamon was ordering him off. He did not hear it; he was deaf and blind. The next instant old John Crichton — it was useless to wait for any cue — walked on the stage and began his scene with Kaleema, and as soon as he could he took Charley by the arm and put him off.

In the wings Charley began raging. "She did n't give me any cue for my exit!" he exclaimed. He rushed to Kaleema's dressing-room. "She's ruining this act!" he bawled to the Gipsy. "She's crazy! Fine house we'll have to-morrow night! When she comes in, tell her to look at her lines and her cues!"

The Gipsy was frightened. That sounded dreadful. She was longing to go out and listen. She began pottering around childishly and disturbing things. Suddenly she stopped and took more of the powder. "Because my heart's so bad," she

whispered, to excuse herself, commiseratingly. Her lips were blue.

The scene with John Crichton went pretty well. So did the rest of the act. The men (even Charley, now) all had their parts in their pockets, and Sarah had hers stuck in the back of the scenery. Kaleema was on the stage most of the time, but when she came off for a minute not a soul spoke to her. Once Sarah ran and got the part for her, and when the curtain came down, as she was groping her way back to the dressing-room, somebody patted her shoulder and said, "It's going fine, Kaleema." It was old John Crichton. That was just like him.

Her mother, very excited, met her with the news from Charley.

"That big man says you 're workin' awful."

"Well, the next time he comes near this room slam the door in his face," said Kaleema. Then she swore terribly.

She began tearing off her dress and hunting madly for the next things. "What have you done here, Mother? Don't touch anything!"

The Gipsy retired to her corner. When Kaleema was dressed she went on studying. Outside somebody else was asking for soap. The "heavy woman" was not on in the second act, so she was not dressing. Charley was back talking to her. "I never, never study at the theater," she was saying.

The second act was called. Kaleema went out, the open part before her eyes. She was n't sure of a word of it. She had worked so hard on the first act and the third act. Pretty time to begin thinking of that now. Thank heaven, George Carney could n't come!

"Come on, Miss West, we're on."

It was the leading man. Lucky thing he reminded her. She had forgotten. Yes, they were holding the curtain for her. She threw the part into a corner and scurried on.

That act was such confusion. Cues came from everywhere, slammed at her mercilessly; and she had long speeches, and the exits were only for instants — she just got the part in her hands when she heard her cue or somebody gently pushed her. If this night were ever ended! Such torture was never meant for the living —

She was dizzy and trembling when she got back to the dressing-room. She was bumping into people, and she was already tearing off her clothes. She knew it had gone horribly. Everybody was nervous by this time.

"I don't know what ails me to-night," she said to her mother: "I feel like death." She was throwing some things out of the way and seizing others. Even her make-up and her hair had to be changed this time. "To-night won't put George

Carney on the map. Good house out there, too. It'll be empty to-morrow. . . . What ails me? I'm not working—I can't do it. Everything is whirling."

"An' my heart 's so bad," said the Gipsy. Her face was ghastly.

"Mother, sit down," said Kaleema. "And remember not to touch that powder." Then she began studying.

Before the third act was called she was at the entrance, studying. Perhaps she was n't sure of the lines, but she knew the climax and where the whole act was trying to get to. That was something. After that terrible second act perhaps everybody would be steadied. If only she did n't forget the business. The act hung on it. Only one quick rehearsal, and there was such a lot of business.

It went through fairly well. The boys, all of them, worked splendidly. Scarcely a line was missed or a bit of business. Anyway, they got a curtain call. That made Kaleema angry. She wanted to go out and say, "See it again next week. You know the story now, so come back and see these people really play it."

One more act was to come. The night was not over. Sarah was not on in that act. Just before it was called, she went to Kaleema's door. "Do you want me to hold the part for you, 'Leema?"

"No thank you, Sarah."

"You're all right so far," said Sarah, "so don't worry."

Then Sarah retreated to her own dressing-room and went about taking off her make-up and putting on her street clothes. She was too nervous to listen. Soon after the act opened she heard something fall. She opened her door; the only sound was voices on the stage. That did not satisfy her. Something made her investigate.

In about fifteen minutes the play was over. Sarah was listening for the end — the sound of the curtain and the dulled and distant sound of applause, if there should be any, and for the scuffling of feet.

When Kaleema reached her dressing-room door, her eyes wide and the big part rolled up in her shaking hands, the passage was uncommonly deserted and quiet, but Sarah Skamon was standing there waiting for her. The door was closed.

"Kaleema, dear," she said gently, "I've sent for a doctor."

Before she spoke the girl's eyes almost frightened her; then suddenly Kaleema seemed to pull herself together. She stared at Sarah; then she put out her hand for the door knob. Sarah stopped her.

"Wait a minute, dear," she said.

Kaleema looked straight at her; then she put her aside and went in. The Gipsy was lying on the

floor. Her face was turned the other way. The girl caught Sarah's hand and stood still.

"Sarah, is she . . . dead?"

"I have sent for a doctor. . . . I'm afraid so."

The part slipped out of Kaleema's hand and fell on the floor. For a moment she stood there. Then she turned and caught Sarah's arm, but her eyes were still on her mother. She wanted to go to her, but she could not then. It came to her how peacefully she lay there.

"She is out of her misery. It is life and *more* life and *more* life that is terrible."

Sarah suddenly caught her breath.

The girl turned away and sank on her knees before a chair and buried her face in her hands.

"God forgive me for ever blaming my poor mother. God forgive me for ever blaming my poor mother. God forgive me for ever blaming my poor mother."

Sarah went over and took her head in her hands and kissed her.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was past one o'clock when Sarah and Skamon returned to the hotel. After the doctor reached the theater one of the first things that Sarah did was to tell Harry to send a telegram to Dillon that they must advance some money to Kaleema.

At nine o'clock the next morning Kaleema came back to the hotel and tapped at their door. Sarah opened it. Kaleema had been up all night, but the hurried walk to the hotel had roused her.

"I came to get *Oliver*. I'm going to work to-night."

Sarah started to say something.

"I can't lose that five dollars," Kaleema interrupted. "And I'd better work than be thinking. Nobody will recognize me in the wig and the knickerbockers." She held out her hand impatiently, and Sarah found the part and gave it to her.

"Rehearsal at ten," said Sarah.

Kaleema took the part—it was not long and she had played it before—and went to her own room. At the threshold she stood and looked around. When she had left it, only a few hours before, her arm was around her mother. She threw herself down on the bed and wept convulsively.

A few minutes before ten she was at the theater. She went straight to her dressing-room. Somebody had already put it in order, so she went out on the stage and studied until the others came.

In the evening the house was filled with the usual Saturday night crowd. What had happened the night before had aroused the curiosity of the whole town, so before the performance Skamon announced that Miss Doro had come from New York especially to play *Oliver*. It had already been advertised what a "wonderful revival" the play was going to be. The heavy woman had played *Nancy* some hundreds of times, so she said, and the leading man had played *Bill Sikes*. Skamon had saved this for Saturday because the grewsome story of blood and murder and prisons never failed to fill the house.

When Kaleema, alias Miss Doro who came especially from New York, in her boy's wig of soft dark curls and her knickerbockers and a torn shirt open at the throat, was seen lying in the prison-like place on a heap of straw, nobody did recognize her. The performance went well, everything considered. The stage-hands and the company worked hard, the scenes changed quickly, and the cruel story moved on to its terrible murder and the end. Chains clanked, *Fagan* leered and counted his treasure, ragged little *Oliver* was knocked and cuffed around, and the dying *Nancy* dragged herself across the floor

while the blood flowed so that out in the audience a woman screamed. Then *Fagan* died in his prison and the last curtain fell.

The next day was Sunday. Early in the morning the company went on, but Kaleema and Sarah stayed. That day they laid the Gipsy to rest.

At night Kaleema and Sarah took a train, and by midnight they were with the company again.

At ten o'clock the next morning "Down East Folks" went into rehearsal.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT Sunday night on the train Kaleema told Sarah that she would never see Harold again. She told her briefly, and tried to keep the bitterness out of it. Her voice was hard.

It was perhaps ten minutes after the train started before she spoke. Poor Sarah had made some commonplace remarks and then sat quiet, not knowing what to say, her heart aching for the quiet figure at her side.

"I'll forget some day, I hope," the girl concluded.

Something was choking Sarah so that she could n't speak, and for answer she put her hand on Kaleema's. The tears she was fighting forced themselves into her eyes.

"I have wanted you so terribly sometimes, Sarah," she said, as if the words were wrung from her.

The two had never seen each other until late in the last summer when fate had tumbled them both into that ill-starred "Camille" company, and yet the show had not been out ten days when Kaleema felt she had known and loved Sarah Skamon all

her life. But that was the way her life was made. With such as she there is no haggling over loves and friendships.

"Why did n't you write to me, child?" sobbed Sarah.

The girl shook her head. Then in a moment she went on.

"I'll remember nothing but his sister. She is wonderful, Sarah. It was worth some misery just to know her. And perhaps some day I shall understand why I dreamed a perfect dream and tried to live it. . . . Anyway, it is useless to think against God . . . useless."

Sarah was watching her. She saw her bite her lips, and knew it was to keep from uttering other words. They were the words Sarah wanted her to utter — the words that would finish what in her unguarded fright and misery she had hinted that dreadful night. It was the unspoken strain that was the most terrible. Sarah did not speak. The horror was still in the girl's eyes, and Sarah knew it was best to wait, that she would talk more in time.

"I was always happy if I just thought that he was," Kaleema went on presently. "But for days together a sort of nervousness seemed to keep me from really breathing. I blamed myself, always. It was the first I ever knew what it is to live without the freedom of truth. We cheap show people

are savages, Sarah. When we're wretched, the whole world may know we're wretched; when we're painted, the whole world may know we're painted; when we quarrel, the whole world may know we're quarreling; and when we love, the whole world may know we're loving. . . . And the little place was lovely. . . . I got happiness out of every cent I ever saved that I spent there." Sarah glanced at her curiously; she did not know how the hard-earned money had gone in the bird and its cage, the flowers and the curtains, the green velvet hat and the dresses, and the many other little things of humble beauty that were joyfully laid at the boy's feet to buy his contentment. . . . "And I wished every day, Sarah, that you could see it — it was so pretty! . . . God! I was fairly blinded by my respectability!" She laughed harshly.

Sarah shuddered. The girl quickly picked up a part and began to study, then in a minute she went on talking, as if she had not left off.

"Remember that day in Dakota, after we knew that he was in the hotel, when you were begging me to marry him? And me begging God to let me! . . . I got what I wanted! — didn't I!" she sneered. "I'll never pray for anything again. I'll take what comes —" Suddenly she caught her breath. She remembered what was coming. She went dizzy.

Sarah knew it, and her hand tightened. She was

longing to speak, but she dared not venture. She was nearly beside herself with anxiety.

"There," said Kaleema, "I shall not speak of him again, I promise you. Anything but show people with their troubles!"

"Talk all you want to, dear," said Sarah. "Often things that we speak of lose half their terror."

"But I don't want to," said Kaleema. "All that I can think of is that I am so thankful that mother's powder lasted to spare her misery at the end."

Then she fell to studying on "The Waiting." Tuesday night it would go on again. And the slow train, loaded with its unclean, weary crowd, jerked and rushed and dragged along.

Tuesday morning Carney came.

He had secured the permanent theater for the summer, and his brain was teeming with plans. He himself seemed like a different man. Even his voice had a different ring. He was more like his old self. The physical work of the past weeks had done him untold good, and he had lost the nervous strain of the exhausting uncertainty of the old show. He breathed more freely the instant he was out from under the slow, corroding dishonesty of Skamon. Now he had something of his own which even Dillon could not rule, and George Carney once more faced

the world aggressively, admitting cheerfully that he was out to lose or win.

The company would open June 20. On the train he was thinking about the last time that he had seen Kaleema before she was married — that cold night in Dakota, at the station, when he left her before the train came and went tramping off, blindly, over the fields of snow. Now when he first saw her it was at the rehearsal. He got in at a quarter of ten, and went right to the theater, where they were beginning work on "The Waiting."

When there was an opportunity he went to Kaleema and held out his hand, muttering something about her mother. She felt how awkward it was for him to find words, and tried to help him. It seemed to him that she had changed, that there was a new sensitiveness in her lips and a helplessness in her eyes, and where her hair was carelessly pushed back he could see the soft lines of her cheeks and temples, and he thought they had grown a little rounder. To him, it made her look like a child.

"Is n't there anything that I can do for you?" he said. In his awkward way he was always trying to help her. But she did n't see it now.

She bit her lips and shook her head as she turned away from him. He understood.

The rehearsal was going on, and presently everything else was forgotten. Carney was standing at one side out of the way, one foot up on a chair,

listening and watching intently. He was like a big edition of a small boy desperately serious over a new toy — would it work? Whenever he was much interested in a thing his hat was either pushed back on his head or pulled a little over his eyes. To-day it was a little over his eyes. Occasionally, when Sarah was not busy she would go over and talk to him in an undertone — she had all the traditional tricks of the manager's wife — and he bent down, his kind eyes attentive to her at the same time that his ears kept sharp account of what Skamon was doing with the rehearsal. Once or twice he scribbled down a note for some change, while he smiled at the absurdity of his tampering with that Broadway show. No matter. He was ready to gamble on his own convictions. He was also admitting that Skamon was far from a fool.

After the rehearsal was over he found himself talking with Kaleema. So much that was impersonal had intervened that it was easier this time. Presently the others left the theater, and they were alone. She was sitting on a narrow flight of dusty stairs that led up to some of the dressing rooms, and Carney was standing by the railing. He was explaining to her all about the summer stock. He had already engaged a fairly well-known actor for leading man. It was easy enough to get almost anybody, with a traction company back of the enterprise.

"I like this chap, Gresley, though," he added, "and I want to keep him for other parts — if he will stay. What do you think of him?"

"He's all right," answered Kaleema emphatically. "Good actor and minds his own business. Has a sick wife, too," she added, "so he really needs the engagement, and he won't be eternally hopping around with a chip on his shoulder."

"We'll try one bill a week," said Carney, "and see how it goes."

"Most of the summer stocks have to put on two," she reminded.

"I know it," he admitted, "but we'll see what this place is good for." His eyes narrowed shrewdly and he gave a decided nod of his head. He thrust his hands into his pockets and began walking up and down before her. "We'll do it, too, rather than fail," he added. "We'll start with two good royalty bills," he went on, "then use 'Oliver Twist' or 'East Lynne,' and follow that with 'The Waiting,' worked up big and the New York run advertised for all it is worth."

He stopped and brought his fist down on the railing. He looked at her to see what she thought of it.

"That's splendid," she said intently.

"Sarah Skamon is a treasure," he said, his mind rapidly going from one thing to another.

"But that awful Harry!" interrupted Kaleema.

"Don't worry about him," Carney said quickly, his eyes narrowing again. "If he does n't straighten out some of his meanness and cheap-skate notions, he 'll suddenly find himself missing. And I 'm ready to bet anything that Sarah will stick by the show."

"You 're right there," Kaleema exclaimed eagerly. She had forgotten herself in listening to him. To both of them the company and the shows were intensely alive. It was a life compelling and engrossing. She did n't know it then, but it was good to be back with her own kind!

"I 'm tired to death, anyway," began Carney, walking again, "of these wise old-timers who have n't kept anything with them but their ratty old wigs and their played-out methods and close-lipped faces and dishonesty."

"You 're perfectly right," she said. "Of course they 'll jump all over you, but don't let them scare you."

His mind had already gone to something else. He stood still before her.

"Of course," he said, "anything can be trusted to John Crichton, whether he 's lit up like a church or sober, but what in the Lord's world to do with Charley! He is certainly the rottenest actor the cowboys ever missed killing."

"He 's so sharp and so pompous," said Kaleema, "why don't you put him in the business end?"

Carney snapped his fingers. "Gee whiz, kid,

you've hit it! I've lain awake nights trying to think of a man I could trust." So much for one of his perplexities. He pushed his hat to the back of his head and walked a few paces, his hands in his pockets. Then he turned. "He's all right, isn't he?"

"Sure."

"Will he take it?"

"He will if I tell him to," announced Kaleema. "And I can promise him one thing for certain, and that is that he'll burst every blood-vessel in his wooden head before he has even commenced with the two-a-week study. Leave it to me to scare him to death."

Carney laughed. It was such a relief to have that question settled. Kaleema leaned forward eagerly, her elbows on her knees. It was so enthralling to put life into the show.

Carney went on about the rest of the company.

"We'll keep this heavy woman for second business," he said. "She's young enough and her work's fairly fit to be seen, and she seems to be a nice, peaceable woman."

"And never, never studies at the theater," subconsciously thought Kaleema. "And you must hunt up some blonde young person," she said.

"Oh, I hate blondes," muttered Carney.

A wan little smile came to Kaleema's lips, like a stranger.

"Is it a show or a harem you're collectin'?" she said drolly.

Carney threw back his head and laughed outright.

"All right, a blonde," he said submissively.

"With an English accent," she cautioned him. "Try your best to get one with an English accent. Get all the English accent you possibly can with all the new people. Audiences don't understand anything else now. Lots of it comes from Indiana, but that does n't matter?"

"All right," he repeated, and he made a note of it. "And perhaps we can get by for a while with doubling and cutting down things to the four women; we can so easily get more when they are needed."

He did not look at Kaleema as he said it. Now that her mother was gone, he did not know that she would stay. Sarah had not had time to tell him anything. Probably she would be going back to Har-old.

He turned away, his hands thrust deeper into his pockets, and walked across the stage. The smiled-in-dents were not under his eyes. But she did not say anything. He went to the baggage door and peered into the alley, to give her time. Still she did not speak.

He came back toward her slowly.

"The men we have are not much good," he said quietly, "and I shall make some changes. I can

give the new men the parts in town, and the rest of you can start rehearsals while you are working. There need not be more than three or four days lost before the opening."

Kaleema got to her feet and shook the dust from her skirt.

"It seems a splendid way to fix things. It's *got* to succeed, anyway." There was a ring in her voice as she said it. She walked slowly toward the outside door. "I'm going back to the hotel now," she said, "to sleep and do a little studying."

When she was gone, it dawned on Carney that she was not wearing a wedding ring. He walked down to the foot-lights and stood for a few moments looking into the shadowy back of the house, not even seeing the galleries or the rows and rows of empty seats or the gorgeous gold boxes with their red plush curtains. Then suddenly he remembered that it was high time he hunted up the big fat Skamon.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE stock company opened on June 20. It was housed in an attractive new theater located only three hours from New York; and it was half-way between two fair-sized towns, within a thirty-minute street-car ride from either of them.

The park was not new, but the traction company had given it a sudden and decided turn for the better. Things started out well; the weather was good, the newspapers of both towns were hard up for news, and Carney seemed likely to more than double his money. Kaleema and the leading man were both getting fifty dollars a week, and Kaleema was gradually paying back her debt to the company. Charley was handling the money now, and he seemed to like the new dignity — his stupid round eyes still staring, his hat on the back of his head, and the pink ring on his saffron finger; his little mustache not growing. Kaleema kept her accounts with him checked up on her dressing-room wall. Every time she put up a figure she would say, "What a pity, on this nice, new, white-washed wall!" and she and Charley would ruefully gaze at it for a moment. She was living very cheaply, but it was the wardrobe that kept her back. She had so little to do with,

and they were putting on good bills and had critical audiences, and she had to keep up with the pace. Even Sarah did not know what a burden it was. Nobody knew but Charley, and he became so excited over it that, just to show her what she was spending, he started a wardrobe account on a space of the wall back of the door. They used to stand and look at it and groan.

Kaleema was working very hard. Outside of work, she had no time to think. She wanted no time to think. Often, after matinées, she and Sarah would leave the theater together and wander for a few minutes around the park; but whenever she caught Sarah looking anxiously at her she would smile and begin to talk. Sometimes when she was studying she would find her mind going to other things — and though she did not know it, the strange look of horror and defiance was back in her eyes. Then she would stop short and get back to the never-ending lines again.

The new actors were of the expensive variety in the winter time, and they seemed to be rather nice fellows, but they never knew their lines — even on Saturday night — and Skamon dared not say a word for fear they would pack up their nice wardrobes and their nice English accents and leave. That was one penalty he paid for being so close to town. Three of them were really English, and at first none of them had a bit of respect for the barnstormers in

the company, with the exception of fine old John Crichton; but he, of course, had come from far better things. Charley was absurd enough with his talk about his rich father; but as he sent home to his tailor and ordered clothes that everybody could see his own salary never paid for, they were constrained to believe him. After a while they did admit that the barnstormers worked well — and they evidently stood in with the management, such as it was!

The barnstormers liked them pretty well, in spite of their condescension. "They 're the nearest we 'll ever get to Broadway, Sarah," Kaleema used to whisper in the wings. The blonde young person with the English accent, however, turned out to be very disagreeable — she was used to so much better companies, poor thing.

By the end of the second week the fastidious light comedian thought that he was in love with Kaleema. He became very serious about it, and was miserably jealous of poor Charley. He lived at the same place that she did, and he took to standing outside her closed door and reading the "Rubáiyát" to her. She used to tell him that he would be "doin' better to study a little instead of standin' there throwin' temptation over the transom," but he did not see it that way. He had worked in New York, and it seemed such a waste of brain to study for "these peasants."

The third week somebody among the barnstormers discovered that Sam Taney, by another wild flight

of fortune, had got back into vaudeville and was making rather a hit on Broadway, and that sent them into a state of excitement. Charley was ordered to telegraph to him their combined and unbounded joy; and, to their surprise, Sam dashed out to see them one morning, had a good old gossip, told lies big enough to knock the breath out of the expensive (in the winter time) actors, and immediately dashed back again. He explained that the job had its drawbacks (the man he was working with was crazy) but still he was rather happy.

Then the week came which was to see Carney's try-out for "The Waiting." If it had not been a big success in town, at least everybody had not seen it. That was one thing. The New York run was played up for all there was in it, fairly good time was given for rehearsals, and Kaleema and Carney and Skamon worked like slaves. Carney had some new photographs made of Kaleema, which the newspapers took eagerly. He had a lot of them framed and put around the two towns, and when he had time he liked to stand and watch people stop to look at them. He sent a two-column cut to the "Clipper" and paid ten dollars to have it put in. Skamon let Kaleema take a day off when there was no matinée and go in to New York, and she bought a beautiful dress, left over from the winter and marked down. While there, she came face to face with Miss Rebecca Sorkai. It was impossible to

escape, for the pretty little school teacher threw her arms around her; and they both had tears in their eyes when Kaleema went on, stubbornly refusing to tell where she was going or could be found.

The week of "The Waiting" closed splendidly. The expensive actors put their wise heads together and announced that it was a better play than it had been on Broadway; that Miss West was perhaps worth a little training, and that they had worked for greater but also meaner men than Carney. The light comedian was so wrought up over the way Kaleema had looked in the new dress that he spent nearly the whole of Saturday night in a saloon. They were also interested in rumors that "The Waiting" was going on the road, and they woke up perceptibly when Carney was around.

As for Carney himself, his mind was always weeks ahead of current events, so by the time the successful run of "The Waiting" came, he was mentally already grappling with the road show. After the Saturday night performance, however, he went and knocked at Kaleema's door.

"Yes?" she called. She thought that it was Charley.

"Are you decent?" he inquired.

For a moment her heart stood still. This was his first coming since that dreary night in Dakota. The very words, and they brought back a flood of memories.

"Wait a minute," she answered. Her own words of that same night. She could n't repress them, though she tried. Then she opened the door.

He came in and closed the door after him. She sat on the edge of the make-up table and put her foot on the chair, waiting for him to speak. She had slipped on a kimono, and her hair was down and caught back. Across her brows and eyes there was the look of a child.

"You have done splendid work this week," he said.

"Splendid part," she said tersely. "Could n't kill it with an ax."

He stood looking at her, at the soft lines of her cheeks and temples. Suddenly he remembered what he came for. He unrolled a paper. It was the "Clipper." He held it out and showed her a picture.

"Me!" she cried. "*Me?*" Her eyes were sparkling. "ME in that damn 'Clipper'!" She seized it from him and hugged it close to her and kissed it, rocking back and forth and laughing gleefully.

Carney laughed in his quiet way. He had had no idea it would make her so happy.

"My Gawd!" she said slowly, "you blew ten dollars!" She rolled it up. "I'll keep this one," she said. "You can buy another." She threw it

into her trunk. "And I'll buy ten more," she added.

"I brought this to show you, too," he said. He held out to her a little slip of paper with Charley's weekly counting-up of the box office receipts.

She gave a gasp of surprise and delight, then she seized his hand to bring the figures nearer. While she was studying over them he was looking down at her, wishing that he could take the old make-up rag out of her hands and wipe the streaks of paint from her soft skin.

Suddenly she glanced up. She was thinking deeply — for her.

"That night we met you in the theater I thought about you all the evening — that you are a thousand times too good for the show business and that, anyway, you would n't succeed." She shrugged her shoulders and gave a little laugh at her mistake.

Carney smiled. "I have n't yet, so keep right on prognosticating that same way." He glanced around at the confusion of the little dressing-room. He did n't quite know how to get away. "You don't wear your earrings any more," he said, almost without thinking.

Her lips went dry and she caught her breath. She had nearly said that it was because Harold did n't like them. The tears started in her eyes.

"They're in my trunk. Do you like them?" she said instead.

A tinge of red covered Carney's neck and face. He was downright shy about saying that he did.

"They seem to belong with you," he answered.

She slid down from the table and went to the trunk, found the earrings and began to put them on.

"And I like them," she said. Then she added, "I'll bet you like the green velvet hat, too."

"I do," admitted Carney.

He did n't know what else to say; so he just went out.

CHAPTER XXX

THAT week settled Carney's plans for the start of the next season. "The Waiting" was going on the road, and he was going ahead of the show. He believed a good deal in luck, but he also wanted a hard-working advance man. And he also believed that if he wanted a thing well done he had to do it himself.

Before the end of August Kaleema's debt to the company was paid, and at the same time a new woman came to take her place in the stock company. She went back to New York for rehearsals of "The Waiting." John Crichton was to be in the cast, and so was Sarah. Carney had offered an engagement to Sarah but not to Skamon (he had more than one reason), and she very readily turned her fat back on Harry. Skamon was dumbfounded. For the thirty years of their married life they had never been separated. The poor, dishonest, old-fashioned, unsuccessful man was most unhappy. His plans were to take out a repertoire company — another season of "Dillon and Skamon." Only there would be no Sarah. Not even Trilby.

Charley Forbes was to be the business manager

of "The Waiting." So he had all his clothes pressed, and bought a lot of new collars, and packed his trunk so full that it weighed more than the scenery. At that, Kaleema had to make room in her trunk to carry a hat for him. He started in to apologize and explain, but she impatiently interrupted by seizing the hat. It was a scorching hot day and she was tired.

"Never mind explaining," she said shortly. "It's always the case that the worst actor swears the most and carries the heaviest trunk."

He went off, much offended; but he left the hat with her. She packed it with a seven-pound electric flat-iron inside it.

Carney was sorry that the leading man of the summer stock would not go, but he wanted a great deal too much money. So he found another man. He had Kaleema and Sarah and Crichton to start with, and the rest of the cast of eight was made up of pretty good people. Kaleema listened eagerly when he came back to the hotel from the agencies and told her about the people he had talked with and what he thought of their possibilities. All those he wanted were too expensive, and all those within his reach he didn't want. All the time he was talking Kaleema was thinking of the hundreds of times she had talked to managers while she was secretly trying to decide in an instant whether she should stick on or knock off ten dollars. She had tried

both ways, and she had lost a lot of things she wanted because she was ten dollars too expensive, and a lot more because she was ten dollars too cheap.

Finally she asked Carney to let her go to one of the agencies with him, and he did. He saw what a mess he was making of it. She made up her mind what people she wanted, then she told Carney to break it to them gently what the parts were paying, and that if they did n't faint they would probably go. To his surprise some quite civilized-looking people accepted, and the whole thing was settled that morning.

When he got out on the street again his pulse was beating hard. He realized for the first time what a gamble the whole thing was. Here were these people ready to go to the ends of the earth trusting to nothing but his luck and honesty. He remembered how much it had cost him last winter to get back from the snow-fields of Dakota, and that they left the Ginivens hanging by a thread, John Crichton stranded, and Godiva with nothing but "Science and Health" and the deceitful stove. He did not know that it was something in himself that made them trust him.

He glanced down at Kaleema.

"You do know this business, kid!" he exclaimed.

She looked up at him and smiled. He was warm and tired, and his hat was on the back of his head. "You got a pretty keen lot of people," she said.

"They would n't have gone for Dillon or Skamon."

His color deepened; there was no mistaking her meaning.

"You picked them out," he insisted.

"But nobody but you could have coaxed 'em as far as Hoboken."

Carney left a week ahead, and on the twenty-seventh of August, another scorching day, the show opened.

One night stands again! — but better towns than they had played before. They were going west, too; Kaleema hoped and prayed not to Dakota. And there would be plenty of time to think. Oh, God, yes! plenty of time to think. Tired as she was, she shuddered as she sat down in the first train. It seemed beyond all that she could endure.. Sleepless nights and interminable waits at junctions and slow jumps on the trains — no study, no rehearsals, no dressmakers, no mad hurry of the summer — nothing to do but to see the world and work and life as it is and what one pays for living, and to think, think, think.

CHAPTER XXXI

SARAH SKAMON suddenly developed an exasperating habit of writing letters. After the show had been out a week, it seemed to Kaleema that she never wanted her that she did n't find her in the hotel office humped up over a desk, writing. On such occasions Sarah always tried to look innocent, feeling all the time as if she had been caught setting fire to a church or robbing a blind beggar; when it came to the real thing, Sarah Skamon was a poor actor. However, Kaleema made no comments. Even with Sarah, she was quite professional in the matter of minding her own business. So she would wander off, desperate and lonely.

They were working in the worst of the summer heat, and it lasted all through September. They were too worn-out to care. At night they strained themselves to the effort of the play, and because those who came to see it were thrilled they were satisfied. Kaleema was existing on the hope and the determination that it should succeed. All her life her work had been miserably changeable and uneven, one night rising to her best and the next night falling far below; but now when she struggled

through a poor performance she rushed back to her dressing-room with tears of anger in her eyes. She blamed it to the heat, her exhaustion, her almost sleepless nights, and the tormenting flies and mosquitoes in the hotel rooms.

After a month of that discomfort the weather began to cool a little. Then other things tormented her thoughts; and Sarah saw the fright and the hardness coming back into her eyes. Sarah dreaded the afternoons and their beautiful autumn sunsets. She often wondered if Kaleema did n't miss the last year's walks with Carney, but she dared not mention it because it would bring back Harold's letters and visits and their consequences.

It developed that Sarah was pestering Charley about how to spell some word that stumped her. She had confidence in him because he had been to college. She did not bother about the fact that he was there just long enough to get put out and sent in disgrace back to his father.

Kaleema looked at her in amazement when she heard it. Her professional attitude broke down.

"What are you doing, Sarah Skamon!" she exclaimed. "Are you falling in love again with that cross old Harry?"

"Possibly," answered Sarah very mildly. She began fumbling with the written pages, so that Kaleema could n't read anything. "I don't write so *many*," she went on defensively, "but I like to have

them look nice, so I have to copy and copy and copy."

"Hum!" said Kaleema.

As the autumn dragged on to early winter Sarah took to more anxious worrying. She would watch Kaleema for a while, and then dash off for a walk in the wind, trying to decide what to do. Suddenly she took to sewing, trying to assume an attitude that would encourage curiosity and conversation. She sewed persistently, right before Kaleema's eyes, but the girl would sit there as if she were blind. Kaleema worked hard at night, but outside of that she scarcely spoke to a soul, and often there was so much of the horror in her eyes that it frightened Sarah.

Finally Sarah made up her mind.

One day in the train (it was very cold outside and there was snow on the ground) Sarah left her seat and hurried toward Kaleema, who was sitting all alone. Sarah was carrying something white in her shaking hands. When she reached the girl she stopped and leaned toward her.

"Here, 'Leema, hem this," she commanded, and she handed the something white to her.

It fell over the girl's gloveless hands as they lay in her lap.

"What is it?" she asked. With that she held it up — soft white cloth with a little neck-hole and two tiny sleeves. Her hands fell with it, almost without sensation, and her lips went pallid.

"A dress," snapped Sarah Skamon, "to cover

the nakedness of your child. You could sew by the year for that horrid little Giniven thing, but you leave all this for me."

Sarah could trust herself to say no more, and she ran back to her own seat, trembling and half-sobbing.

Half an hour later she went just far enough down the aisle to see that Kaleema was sewing.

That night after the show Sarah wrote a somewhat incoherent letter. This much was clear, however: "To-day I made her hem three dresses — one on the train and two at the junction. I trembled for an hour after I told her to do it. I suppose the lord knew what he was about when he made women."

She spelled "Lord" without a capital letter. Perhaps she did it intentionally.

The letter she addressed to "George Carney, Theater, care of 'The Waiting.'"

CHAPTER XXXII

ONE day in the winter, in a hospital ward, a certain baby was having its first good cry. The nurses called it the "show" baby.

They did not know much about it, but they knew positively that its mother was very strange.

They knew she had played there one night some-time ago, in "The Waiting"; then she stayed and the show went on. When she first came to the hospital she said that she was Miss West, and a moment later she was answering questions by announcing angrily that she had a marriage certificate in a storeroom at the hotel, in her trunk. Then, before the doctor or the nurse or anybody could stop her, she hurried out of the hospital, and it was more than an hour before she came back; but then, her defiant eyes filled with tears and her hands trembling, she had the marriage license with her and she spread it out on the table, with the money that she was to pay. The nurse who was registering her looked at it, and put her down as Mrs. Kaleema West Barton, although the name of Barton had not once passed her lips, and then Mrs. Barton seized it and started to tear it up. But the nurse quickly

took it from her, and she never saw it again until the day she left the hospital. At first the doctors and nurses called her Mrs. Barton, but she said very quietly, though not looking at them, "Please use my right name. I am Miss West."

At first she would sit for hours by the bed that had been allotted to her, with her arms on it and her face buried in them, sobs convulsing her, though she tried to be quiet and not disturb anybody. With everything else that she was thinking, she was blaming herself bitterly that she had not been much kinder to the Giniven child. If anybody spoke to her unnecessarily she would quietly get up and walk away. Not one word that could be avoided passed her lips; but once, in the night, when a nurse came near she said to her:

"Will you kindly give this message to the doctor — if he possibly can, for God's sake to let us both die."

The nurse tried to say something, but Kaleema buried her head in the covers. The rest of the night she lay there wide-awake, her lips ceaselessly moving, burning tears drenching her soft dark hair and the pillow.

Even when the baby was lustily crying, it seemed to the doctors and nurses that her lips would never cease moving (it must be that they were praying), or the hot tears cease flowing — that she would never open her eyes and face the world. They gave her

what care they could, but she never complained. She would scarcely look at the baby, but she caught the nurse's hand frantically and whispered, "Is it — deformed — or anything?" The nurse said no, but she interrupted with, "For God's sake let it die!"

After that all that she begged was to get away from the hospital, and at last, one day, they let her go. She left with her once-free, strong, brave little hands full of the soft, breathing bundle.

The wife of the hotel proprietor had promised to let her stay and do some sewing to pay for her board. She needed money badly. While she was with "The Waiting" she had saved all the money she could; but many of the jumps were awkward — they had often stayed at three hotels in twenty-four hours — and the hospital took a good deal more.

The proprietor's wife was very good to her. She tucked her away in a comfortable little room, and when she went out and closed the door Kaleema took her first long look at the baby.

It was the first time that the two had been alone. Here no curious eyes were watching them. It was asleep, and she had carefully put it down on the bed. She stood and looked at it, pity and horror and helplessness in her eyes. She seemed afraid to touch it. She had never kissed it. "God forgive me," she said aloud. Then she dropped down on her knees and covered her face. "Poor little

thing, forgive me, forgive me! O God, let it die, let it die! Forgive me for blaming my poor mother for the life that was forced on me. Forgive me for ever blaming my poor mother!"

This was the hour that for so long she had been foreseeing with terror. She was alive and the baby was alive. The release of death had been denied them, and they went out in the world, clinging now to life madly and paying to the end for living. She had done just what she had blamed her mother for doing — only it was worse in her, because she knew. Again life's lessons would go for nothing. Each one had to learn by living. She could only stand by, helpless, while God put the baby back to the beginning. . . . At last she was thinking bitterly against God.

By and by she went downstairs and came back with a pile of work in her arms.

She sewed pretty steadily every day, for the little bundle on the bed slept a great deal. Of course it cried, too, but if it did n't stop when she fussed with it the proprietor's wife would come in, and she seemed to know just what to do. Then, when it stopped crying, she would take it around the hotel and show it to people. Its mother worried her a great deal more than the baby did. She tried to talk to her, but Kaleema would just put her hands over her silent lips and hurry out of the room.

She had promised Sarah to write often, but she

wrote just once, a few lines. One morning when she was up at five o'clock with the baby, she wrote to Gertrude. All that she said was that she wanted her freedom and knew that Harold wanted his, and she begged of him to start immediately whatever it was necessary to do. She gave no address but the "Clipper," and then she hurried out and put the letter in a street box. She had planned long ago that this was what she would do just at this time, if she lived. When it was really done a great weight was lifted from her mind. At night, after the sewing was put away and the bundle on the bed was settled down for a few hours, she would shade the light, and in a few minutes would find herself back there kneeling by the bed, the burning tears on her cheeks and her lips repeating the almost ceaseless words, "O God, don't let it live for just misery! Let it die, let it die. Poor little thing, forgive me!"

One night while she was kneeling there she heard a slight sound, and when she turned her head she saw that the door was softly opening. Then a man stepped into the room's dim light.

"George Carney!" she whispered.

He gently closed the door, and she got to her feet.

The next instant he was holding both her hands and the old look of welcome was in her eyes. He did not speak; he just smiled.

"George Carney!" she said again. She had not

seen him since August. All at once she knew how she had been missing him and longing for him.

"Sarah wrote me that you would n't write to her, so I came in for two hours. Where's the star juvenile?" It was so good to hear his voice again.

She turned and pointed to the bundle.

He went to the bed and leaned over it. She followed and turned back the covers until the little face could be seen. Then she looked at Carney. The dents under his eyes were deepening and his fine teeth were glistening in the dim light.

"You are laughing at it!" she exclaimed, her voice low, not to waken the baby.

"It is certainly the homeliest thing I ever beheld," he whispered.

"How horrid of you! Everybody says it's perfectly splendid. When we were its age I suppose we looked just as bad."

He shook his head. That was hard to believe.

She pulled up a chair for him and sat down on the foot of the bed. She wanted to hear all about the show. He told her all the news that had reached him, but he did not tell her that for a long time he had been getting letters from Sarah telling him about her. And then he began chuckling over his good luck. The show was doing well, and, if it kept up, next season he would put out two or three companies. Then he began turning his hat in his hands and said, casually, that he had thought she might need

some money now, so he had written Charley to advance her some on next season. She tried to remonstrate, but he would not listen.

"But probably next season I can't leave the baby."

"Then I'll send you out in 'East Lynne' and it can go along and play *Little Willie*."

She laughed for the first time in months. They talked about the cold weather, about the jumps, and about Sunday dates and what big towns were booked for the rest of the month. Then, when he had reached the end of his rope of conversation, he got up apparently to go. As he did so an overwhelming something seized her. She wanted him to stay. He went to the door and put his hand on the knob. Then, rather suddenly, he put his hat on the dresser and his two big hands on her two shoulders. He looked straight at her. For the second time in their lives she knew that something was coming. This time she let it come.

"Leema, are you entirely through with that cad?"

"Yes."

Then for the second time in their lives he took her tight in his arms. And this time she stayed there.

"And when you can, you will marry me?"

"And the baby, too?"

It was ambiguous, but he seemed to understand.

"You don't suppose that we would feed it to the lions?"

She pushed away and looked at him. Carney, always Carney, when the world seemed darkest. But even then she never thought of gratitude. She was too utterly blinded by the conviction that she had always loved him.

"Not unless you truly believe that it is not just because you always help me when things seem the hardest."

"I believe that you would have married me in the beginning if —"

"If it had not been for a dream," she said. "But you are better than what dreams are made of."

He smiled. "I am very far from a dream," he said.

"Can you ever forgive me?" she whispered.

"For what?" he said.

For what! She understood. She could not speak. She was silently thanking God for the lawfulness that George Carney wanted in a woman and to which she had clung. She forgot her bitter derision.

Then she found her voice. "And if I get cross and slap the baby, will you please slap me?" He laughed. "And don't ever, ever, ever let her be like me," said Kaleema.

For answer he took her back in his arms. "When will you be free?"

"I have already written to his sister."

Presently he looked at his watch. It was fifteen

minutes of train time. One last kiss and word and he was gone.

She softly closed the door after him and turned back into the room, and before she knew what she had done she had fallen on her knees by the bed and was kissing the baby.





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